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Punctured Soul

by [SkinnyProcrastinator](#)

Summary

A telephone call leads Henry to worry about Regina, when Emma goes to investigate she finds that Regina is in a dire situation but no one in Storybrooke wishes to help the former Evil Queen on the day after the curse has broken.
Slow burn SwanQueen.

Chapter 1

"Henry!" Regina's desperate voice came down the telephone line, "oh, Henry.."

"What do you want, Regina?" Henry's young voice bitterly replied.

While her voice softened dramatically the desperate tone remained, "Henry, thank you for.. for speaking with me.."

Henry didn't reply so Regina continued to speak, "I have to let you know some things, please, p-promise me you'll give me j-just five minutes?"

"Are you okay?" Henry's voice replied with the tiniest trace of concern detectable, clearly not wishing to be tricked.

"Y-yes," she breathed quickly, "we don't have t-time for that though, I just need you to do some things for me, I know I d-don't have any right to ask a-anything of you but p-please listen, okay?"

"Okay," she could hear the frown in Henry's voice.

"A-always remember that knowledge is power so school is i-important," Regina continued determinedly, "attend all of your lessons and study hard, education is a b-blessing, even if it doesn't seem like it sometimes."

"Why are you saying this?" Henry demanded.

"You need to be a good boy for Emma, I need you to d-do what she tells you," Regina said in a tone that sounded like she was crying, "s-she will know what is best so even if you're not c-certain you should still listen to her, okay?"

"Mom?" Henry asked and Regina didn't know if he was referring to her or not.

"I'm n-not very good at loving people, Henry," she told him softly, "d-don't make my mistakes, if you find someone you love then l-love them fully and d-don't ever let them go, do you understand?"

"Mom, you're scaring me," he admitted hesitantly.

"Henry," she whispered as her voice became decreasingly lower in tone, "promise me that you won't hang on t-to hatred, to anger."

"Mom.." Henry started.

"Promise me," her voice briefly grew in strength before dipping again, "down that path is nothing for you, promise me that you'll be forgiving.."

There was a muffled sound on Henry's side of the call before he replied, "I promise, I promise, Mom.."

"Good," Regina breathed, "good boy, Henry.. I know it may be hard for you to believe right now but I need you to know that I love you and that I have always loved you," her voice grew in strength as she emphasised the point, "you have been my entire world these past ten years and I.. love you."

"Mom?" Henry asked when she fell silent.

"Mom?!"

Chapter 2

Mary Margaret was the one who picked up the ringing phone and rolled her eyes at Emma who was just entering the loft, "I don't know if that's a good idea," she intoned angrily down the phone. As she listened her facial expression changed from anger through to confusion, "are you," she started before being cut off.

Emma was hanging her coat up as she looked over at Mary Margaret with a furrowed brow. Suddenly Mary Margaret looked at Henry and held the mouthpiece of the phone to her shoulder to muffle the conversation, "it's Regina, she really wants to talk to you, I think it's important.."

"You don't have to, Henry," Emma quickly added and looked at Mary Margaret with an unwavering glare.

"What does she want?" Henry asked irritably.

"I don't know," Mary Margaret admitted, "but she is being very persistent.."

Henry sighed and nodded as he held out his hand and took the offered phone from Mary Margaret and said, "what?"

After a short pause and a Regina-style roll of the eyes he asked, "what do you want, Regina?"

"What was that about?" Emma asked Mary Margaret while looking down at Henry who was stood in-between them.

Mary Margaret shrugged, "I've never heard her like that, she was pleading with me.."

"Are you okay?" Henry asked into the phone while looking up at Emma with a tiny flash of concern in his eyes.

Emma frowned at him, wanting to know what was happening but Henry was preoccupied with listening to the call as he nodded with a frown and said, "okay."

"Kid?" Emma asked with a matching frown growing more concerned at Henry's distress.

"Why are you saying this?" Henry suddenly asked in confused anger.

"Why did she say to you?" Emma demanded of Mary Margaret to try to gain some understanding.

"Mom?" Henry called Emma with a panicked expression as he reached out and tapping her hand.

"What is she saying, Henry?" Emma asked, this time wanting an answer.

Henry adjusted the phone from one ear to the other and cranked up the volume and pulled it away from his ear slightly so Emma could also hear as he admitted, "Mom, you're scaring me."

Mary Margaret and Emma knelt beside him and all three listened to the deep but quiet voice drifting from the earpiece.

"Henry," Regina's voice floated between the three of them, "promise me that you won't hang on to hatred, to anger."

Mary Margaret and Emma exchanged a confused glance as Henry started, "Mom.."

"Promise me," Regina strong voice spoke.

A crack in her voice gave way to a much weaker voice that all three struggled to hear, "down that path is nothing for you, promise me that you'll be forgiving.."

"Something's wrong," Mary Margaret whispered to Emma.

"I promise, I promise, Mom," Henry told her quickly.

"Good," Regina said so quietly that Henry stopped holding the phone out and instead held it close to his ear.

"We have to check on her," Mary Margaret announced to Emma.

Emma sighed, "do we? After all she's done?"

"She is still Henry's mother," Mary Margaret pointed out, "and it was only yesterday that Whale lead a mob to try to kill her."

"Mom?" Henry spoke and both women looked at him as he held the phone tightly to his ear with both hands as she strained to listen for any sounds.

"Mom?!" Henry cried down the phone.

Mary Margaret grabbed the phone, "Regina?"

Henry looked panic-stricken as he looked from Mary Margaret to Emma and back again.

Mary Margaret looked at Emma and shook her head, "there's a," she flicked her eyes to Henry before looking back at Emma, "that's a strange, deep breathing, nothing else.."

Chapter 3

Regina sat on the floor with her back against the wall and her legs stretched out in front of her as she held the phone to her ear and waited. She had never been so happy to hear Henry's grumbled, "what?"

"Henry!" Regina smiled in relief, "oh, Henry.."

"What do you want, Regina?" Henry asked her she had to admit there was a poetic irony that it hurt her more than her current predicament.

"Henry, thank you for.. for speaking with me," she grimaced at how weak her voice sounded and hoped that he wouldn't notice. When he didn't reply she continued, "I have to let you know some things, please, p-promise me you'll give me j-just five minutes?"

He asked if she was okay, the concern in his voice was absolutely minuscule but she was grateful for even that. It meant that there was a chance that she would get through the call without him hanging up on her.

"Y-yes," she answered him in a breathy wisp of a voice, "we don't have t-time for that though, I just need you to do some things for me, I know I d-don't have any right to ask a-anything of you but p-please listen, okay?"

He replied positively and she smiled in relief that she had at least brought him up well enough that he would give her this opportunity.

"A-always remember that knowledge is power so school is i-important," Regina struggled to speak and cursed her breaking voice but continued determinedly, "attend all of your lessons and study hard, education is a b-blessing, even if it doesn't seem like it sometimes."

He asked why she was saying these things and he sounded angry. Part of her wanted to explain, to tell him that Mommy had had an accident or something of that ilk but she knew she had only enough energy to get out what she wanted to say.

"You need to be a good boy for Emma, I need you to d-do what she tells you," it hurt to say but Regina knew that it needed to be said.

A tear fell down her cheek as she added, "S-she will know what is best so even if you're not c-certain you should still listen to her, okay?"

He said her name, well, not her name, more the denomination that she now had to share with Emma Swan. She wasn't sure if it was directed at her or not and she considered asking but then her eyes registered just how much blood was streaked along the hallway floor to where she was sitting and she remembered she didn't have time for frivolous conversation, only for what was absolutely necessary.

"I'm n-not very good at loving people, Henry," she admitted and was concerned that her voice was so low that she could barely hear herself, "d-don't make my mistakes, if you find someone you love then l-love them fully and d-don't ever let them go, do you understand?"

He said that she was scaring him and she wished she could soothe him but she just didn't have the luxury of that kind of time.

"Henry," she whispered in a low rumble, "promise me that you won't hang on t-to hatred, to anger."

He started to question her and she gathered all of her strength as she barked, "promise me," she needed to hear him make this promise, "down that path is nothing for you, promise me that you'll be forgiving," she explained.

She lifted her hand from one of the many wounds on her stomach and stared at the thick coating of blood with a puzzled expression before remembering what had happened and looking down at her body to see how bad things were.

Henry promised, she couldn't remember what she had asked him to promise but she felt that it was very important to her.

"Good," Regina breathed with heavy relief, "good boy, Henry.. I know it may be hard for you to believe right now but I need you to know that I love you and that I have always loved you."

She gathered up all of her remaining strength, "you have been my entire world these past ten years and I.. love you."

The phone fell from her delicate grip at the same time her head lolled heavily downwards.

Chapter 4

The first thing that Emma noticed as she pulled up to Regina's house was that the door was wide open and she immediately knew that was a bad sign. She quickly got out of the Bug and ran up the path and she felt her blood chill when she saw the blood in the lower foyer. Her run slowed in fear at what she was going to find and she reached for the gun in her holster.

Pulling the weapon she stepped over the threshold and looked at the blood splatter up the wall as well as the pool of blood on the floor in front of her. A black high heeled shoe lay abandoned in the pool. Handprints formed in blood as well as a large, long streak of blood led away from the main pool of blood and awkwardly up the four steps to the main hallway.

She walked around the edge of the blood and up the steps and saw the long bloodied streak stretching across the entire length of the hallway towards a sight she wasn't prepared for.

"Regina!" Emma cried out as she quickly crossed to the far side of the hall while shakily putting her gun away.

Regina was sat slumped on the floor with her back against the wall and her legs out in front of her, one shoe missing and the other hanging off of her foot. There was blood from her breasts all the way down the front of her white shirt and navy pinstripe waistcoat and her black tailored trousers. Her blood-covered hands clutched at her stomach and her head lolled forward.

The blood-covered phone lay beside her and she could distantly hear Mary Margaret calling Regina's name. She picked up the phone and spoke quickly, "she's hurt, I need to hang up to call an ambulance," she

was feeling for a pulse in Regina's neck at the same time but she couldn't feel one.

She quickly dialled the ambulance service, "this is Sheriff Swan," she hoped the shake wasn't detectable in her voice, "I need an ambulance to Mayor Mills' house immediately, there's been a stabbing."

Verbalising the incident suddenly made it real and Emma felt herself gag as she turned her head away from the phone and Regina for a moment to swallow and get herself together again.

"I'll relay it to the paramedics but I can't guarantee they'll come," the hospital operator told her truthfully.

"If they don't she's going to die," Emma shouted.

"The curse lifted yesterday," the operator said, "they are still angry.."

"I'll bring her in myself!" Emma announced as she ended the call and looked at Regina bleakly. The brunette was very still and her usually healthy complexion was completely drained.

Emma suddenly wished she'd paid more attention to the first aid course she attended six years previous and lifted Regina's head to see if she could detect any sign of life in the woman, "Regina?"

She gently lowered the heavy weight of Regina's head back down and dialled another number into the phone as she brushed her hair out of her face in frustration.

"David! I need you to get to the hospital, I'm at Regina's house and she's been attacked.. it's.. it's," she looked around and took a shaky breath, "really bad. They're refusing to send an ambulance so I'm taking her there myself but I need you to get there so you can back me up, we need to make them treat her.."

Thankfully David agreed and said he'd get over there and find people who would be willing to assist the former Evil Queen. Emma hung up

the phone and dropped it to the marble floor carelessly as she crouched on her haunches and put one arm under Regina's knees and the other around her back whilst tucking Regina's blood-drenched arm around her neck. Slowly she lifted the petite woman up and Regina's head lolled onto Emma's shoulder and Emma looked down at the unconscious features as she whispered, "hold on, Regina, just stay with me.."

Chapter 5

It was an odd time to muse over the English language but as Emma slowly carried Regina around the pool of blood in the foyer and out of the front door she began to wonder about the use of the term dead weight. It was absolutely correct to describe Regina as dead weight at that moment in time but for some reason Emma couldn't stomach the thought of the older woman actually being dead.

Emma didn't know if she was struggling with the concept because she didn't like the idea of carrying a dead body or that she felt she had failed in her job as Sheriff if someone had managed to viciously attack the Mayor. Then she pondered if it was because she promised Henry she would watch out for the woman in her arms or because Henry would be one mother down. She knew that Regina thought that was what Emma wanted, to be Henry's only mother, but the truth was Emma understood that Henry needed both of them.

A lifetime of seeking out parental love and support only to never find it had led Emma with a unique take on their unique situation, Henry was her number one priority and as long as he wasn't being endangered or hurt then he could have as many parents as he wanted. Yes the young boy would survive with one parent, Emma would do everything she could to give him a good life and all the love he needed. But a boy of just ten years of age shouldn't have to go through the distress of losing a parent, especially not in such a violent way.

While Henry knew about Regina's crimes, he had essentially read about them in a fairy tale book. Much the same as many other children, becoming desensitised to the notions of violence and danger, feeling grown up because they knew about terrible deeds but not actually having an understanding of them. The knowledge that someone in Storybrooke hated Regina enough to stab her in her own home and

leave her to bleed to death would be too much for the young boy to take in.

Regina was small and light and Emma was strong but by the time she reached the Bug she was struggling to hold the woman and looked around the street desperately looking for help. When she couldn't see anyone she idly wondered if people had seen her and were simply unwilling to help and had hidden from sight.

She knelt by the rear wheel on the passenger side and half-placed Regina on the floor as she reached up and opened the passenger door. Standing again, she put Regina into the seat as gently as she could, her eyes flicked over the wounds to the brunette's stomach and she could see there were several and she swallowed hard.

Quickly closing the door she sprinted around to the other side and got in the driver's door and started the engine and pulled away from the kerb, managing her speed between urgency and caution so the injured older woman was not thrown about too much.

"Regina!" Emma tried to wake her up, she didn't know much but she knew that conscious was better and if she was honest with herself she needed to see some life in the woman just for her own peace of mind. Emma had always been terrible at feeling for a pulse which was why she failed the first aid course she went on. Now she was hoping that was the reason why she hadn't managed to detect a pulse in Regina, she knew that the blood loss was probably contributing to that as well.

She began to wonder about the identity of the culprit and starkly realised that she may soon be manning a murder hunt. The faces of the people she had grown to think of as friends flashed before her eyes, all of them now were potential killers. Attempted killers, she reminded herself. It had only been a day since the curse was lifted and she was still coming to terms with the fact she was living in the children's section of a bookstore. She wasn't even sure of everyone's second identity yet, that would be key in finding out who did this.

As she pulled the Bug into the car park she was relieved to see David standing by the emergency entrance with a female doctor she didn't recognise. Emma thought back to the previous day when she had stopped Whale from throttling Regina and wondered if he was responsible for the attack. Then again, Whale was a doctor and would surely not be a candidate for a messy and non-lethal stabbing.

Two female nurses appeared by the emergency entrance with a gurney, one of them gave off body language signals that she clearly didn't want to be there and was helping under duress. Emma pulled up in front of them and David opened the passenger door and took a step back in shock.

"Excuse me," the female doctor said as she shouldered David out of the way and crouched down and examined Regina's injuries quickly.

Emma jogged around the car and noticed that David was rapidly losing colour and staring at Regina in shock.

"Hey, you okay?" Emma asked him.

He swallowed and nodded his head, "yes, I just.. I don't know who would do something like this."

"We need help getting her onto the gurney," the doctor announced.

David took a deep breath and stepped forward and reached into the car and scooped up Regina who looked so small and fragile in his arms. He easily carried her to the gurney and laid her down as gently as he could.

"We need to get her into surgery right now," the doctor said as she started to push the gurney.

"So, she's alive?" Emma asked after her hopefully.

"Barely," the doctor confirmed and the medical team disappeared inside the hospital.

Emma let out of a sigh of relief and leaned against the Bug.

“Do.. do you know who did it?” David asked her as he paced.

“No, when I got there they were long gone,” Emma shook her head before looking up at him, “where’s Whale?”

David pointed at the hospital with his thumb, “inside, he refused to help, most of the medical staff are refusing to help her. Partly because of her history but partly because of the frenzy he has whipped them into.”

“So, who was that?” Emma asked as she stood up nervously.

“It’s okay,” David promised, “here she is Doctor Vanessa Stott but back in the Enchanted Forest she was the court physician for Regina when she was the Queen.”

“So, no grudges?” Emma asked hesitantly.

“No, her and Regina have known each other for years, she followed her when she became obsessed with dark magic but she is trustworthy,” David told her, “how did you find her, Regina, I mean..”

Emma quickly brought him up to speed on the mysterious telephone call and the dash to the house and what she found, “Henry can’t know,” she said determinedly.

“What will we tell him?” David asked, “if she does survive she’s going to be injured.”

“She’ll survive,” Emma informed him determinedly, “but I don’t know what to tell Henry, I just want to protect him from this.”

“Agreed,” David said, “we can’t keep too much from him though, you know what he is like..”

“Yes, he’ll investigate it himself if he think we’re holding out on him,” Emma replied with a sigh.

“He heard the call, he knows she is hurt,” David reasoned, “he even saw the mob yesterday, so I say we tell him she was hurt by someone. We don’t know who and then don’t go into any further details.”

Emma considered it for a moment before she reluctantly agreed, “yes, there’s not a lot else we can do, I just wish we could protect him from this..”

“You better get changed,” David pointed out.

Emma looked down at herself and realised she was covered in blood that had dripped from Regina and onto her own clothes while she had carried the woman, “yeah, I also need to get back to the crime scene before anyone has a chance to go back and mess with it. Can you stay here and make sure she is safe? Someone might try this again and until we know more everyone is a suspect.”

“Everyone?” David asked cautiously.

“Well, except you, Henry and Mary Margaret,” Emma replied with a shrug, “I was with you all when it was happening so you have a good alibi.. but everyone else..”

David nodded, “okay, yes, I see what you mean,” he ran his hand through his short blonde hair as he started to think which of his people might have this in them. He shivered at the thought, “I’ll call Mary Margaret and Henry and will update them and then I’ll keep an eye on the surgery to make sure everything is okay.”

“I know it’s not really in your nature but you have to be suspicious of everyone,” Emma told him firmly as she crossed around to the other side of the Bug and looked over the roof at him before she got into the car, “this isn’t a fairy tale anymore, this is an attempted murder.”

Chapter 6

After a quick visit to the Sheriff's office Emma had gotten changed and washed the dried blood off of her skin where it had seeped through her clothes. She moved her Sheriff's badge to a more prominent position on her chest rather than hiding it on her belt as she had been known to do. If the town potentially contained murderers then she wanted to maintain the highest visibility before things really got out of hand. She pulled her hair back into a ponytail and adjusted her gun holster so the leather strap was slightly more visible than usual.

She picked up a digital camera, a Dictaphone as well as some yellow police tape and a foldaway wooden barrier and carried them down to the Sheriff's cruiser and placed them in the trunk of the car before closing it with a slam.

During the short drive to Mifflin Street she looked around at people she passed, some of them seemed to have fitted right back into a normal routine. Some of them were still finding their friends and loved ones and Emma began to devise a way of auditing everyone in Storybrooke, she was well aware that finding the person who had attacked Regina was going to be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

At the Mayor's house she unfolded the wooden police barrier and placed it halfway up the path as a warning for people not to cross. Then she got the other equipment out of the car and with a heavy sigh made her way up to the front door and began to photograph the scene.

Logically she knew that if you spilled a half-full glass of water it looked like a swimming pool had emptied at your feet. Liquids looked worse when they were not contained and when they were allowed to roll about freely. However the amount of blood in the foyer and hallway at Mifflin Street made Emma wonder if Regina had any left

in her body. She wondered if a main artery had been cut but quickly pushed the thought away and decided to wait for the doctor to tell her.

She meticulously photographed the scene, knowing that this would be her one and only chance to detail everything about the crime scene before it became contaminated or was cleaned. She took multiple pictures of everything from a number of viewpoints and photographed all the hand and fingerprints at close range, mentally making a note to take copies of Regina's fingerprints.

With a gloved hand she turned over the telephone and photographed it and made another mental note to check for incoming and outgoing calls. She glanced at the shoe that had fallen off of Regina's foot when she had lifted her up and took a few steps back and shakily sat on the stairs leading to the next level of the house.

Emma wanted to run. This was all too much to take in. Yes, she had hated Regina, most people had at one point or another. But now she was sitting in the older woman's house detailing an extensive and bloody crime scene she wondered how anyone could hate someone this much. She felt incredibly underqualified to deal with this kind of thing and wanted to wipe her hands of it and leave it to someone else.

However, looking at the town with its princesses, dwarves, wolves and imps she knew she was, terrifyingly, the most qualified person to deal with this. She had worked a stint in law enforcement and had a good few years of bail bonds work under her belt. She knew how to document a crime scene and she knew the law.

If she couldn't protect Regina she would absolutely make sure she did her very best to do her job, she knew it was the one thing Regina constantly ordered her to do. She stood up and got the Dictaphone and began verbally documenting the scene.

After fully documenting the scene and checking the rest of the house Emma headed for the garden, it didn't take long before she found the blade that had been used in the attack, tossed casually in Regina's well-kept hedgerow. With glove-covered hands she fished out the

eight-inch blade and photographed the weapon before placing it in an evidence bag.

“Is she dead?”

Emma turned around to see Mister Gold stood by the barrier looking at her with a shadow of a smile as he looked up the garden path and at the hint of what he could see through the front door.

“That remains to be seen, Gold,” Emma said as she stood up and approached him, “do you have anything you’d like to report?”

“Nothing that I can think of, Sheriff,” he pretended to look like he was making an effort to think of anything useful, “but if anything crops up then I’ll certainly let you know.”

He began to turn and walk away when Emma said, “why are you here?”

“Just happened to be passing, Dearie,” he smirked, “saw the excitement,” he pointed to the police barrier with the tip of his cane.

“Did you do it?” Emma asked bluntly.

Gold smiled but shook his head, “no, as much as I would love to see Regina dead for what she did to Belle, no, I didn’t do this.”

“There’s something else,” Emma guessed correctly.

“Well,” Gold admitted with a tilt of the head, “I did consider helping her on her way to the afterlife with a, shall we say, shadowy friend of mine. But, alas, Belle managed to convince me otherwise. Good fortune considering how it ended up, now the Queen is dead and I’m in the clear.”

“She’s not dead,” Emma replied.

“That remains to be seen,” Gold repeated, “you can’t protect her forever, Sheriff.”

“From you?” Emma asked.

“No, not from me,” Gold admitted, “but there’s a lot of people in Storybrooke who will happily take the opportunity.”

“I’ll be watching out for her,” Emma promised.

“Then you’ll have your work cut out for you,” Gold informed her with an almost impressed expression.

“Do you know who did this?” Emma asked him outright, knowing that you never got an answer without asking a question when it came to this man.

“No,” Gold admitted, “although I don’t think you’re going to have a shortage of suspects,” he started to turn and paused as he looked back at her, “am I free to go now, Sheriff?”

Emma nodded and he smirked as he turned and hobbled off up Mifflin Street.

Chapter 7

It was two hours later when Emma returned to the hospital and was not surprised to see Mary Margaret and Henry sitting in the waiting room. They sat side by side on hard plastic chairs between them their hands were lightly entwined and from the terrified look on Mary Margaret's face she got the impression that she needed the comfort just as much as Henry.

"Emma!" Henry cried out and ran towards her to throw his arms around her waist and hold her in a tight embrace.

"Hey, Kid," Emma said solemnly and gently placed her hand on his back and soothingly rubbed between his shoulders as she had seen Regina do in the past.

"They won't tell us anything," Mary Margaret complained as she stood up and took a place beside the mother and son, "David is watching them," she quickly glanced down at Henry in the hope that he didn't understand why David was standing guard by the operating theatre.

"Did you save her?" Henry looked up at Emma with a hopeful smile, "from the attack?"

"Um," Emma started before quickly recovering and saying, "I certainly tried to, Henry, now it's up to the doctor."

"Why is it taking so long?" Henry asked as he loosened his hold on her and pulled back a little, "what are they doing?"

"I don't know," Emma honestly answered, "but your Mom was in a pretty bad way so they have to make sure she is okay."

"What kind of surgery is it?" Henry pressed impatiently.

Emma made eye contact with Mary Margaret who gave her a sad smile, clearly she had been trying to hold back Henry's curiosity for a while and now Emma was here he wasn't going to accept the information void regarding his adoptive mother's condition any longer.

Emma disentangled herself from Henry's arms and knelt in front of him and looked at him with a serious expression as she took his hand in both of hers, "look, Henry, I know you think you want to know everything and that we're wrong for keeping stuff from you but trust me, we're doing it for the right reasons. If there is anything important that you need to know about, I swear, I will tell you. But the truth of it is.. your Mom was attacked, it was pretty bad and we don't know what's going to happen."

Tears welled up in his eyes and Emma continued softly, "we are going to make sure that we do everything we can do to get your Mom the best care and to make sure she is safe but you have to trust us, okay," he nodded and she smiled encouragingly at him as he attempted to smile without letting go of the tears that he was desperately trying to hold at bay.

"W-who?" Henry stammered.

Emma shook her head softly, "we don't know yet but we're doing everything we can to find out."

Henry roughly rubbed at his tears with his coat sleeve, "why won't they tell us anything?"

Emma had a suspicion that the medical staff didn't care about Regina's condition and that's why they weren't sharing any information but she wasn't about to tell Henry that. She stood up, "I'll go and see what's going on, you two wait here," she said, more to Mary Margaret than to Henry. The last thing she needed was Henry following her to the operating theatre and seeing his mother being operated on.

Mary Margaret quickly put her arm around Henry's shoulder and pointed him in the opposite direction as she talked about seeing what

food was in the cafeteria. Emma made sure they were around the corner before she approached the desk and the unfriendly, stern looking nurse sat there, “where’s the operating theatre?”

The nurse made a show of shuffling important looking papers and folders without looking up at Emma for a few moments before nodding her head to a set of double doors over the other side of the room, “they won’t let you in though,” she mumbled.”

“Thanks for your help,” Emma said with a sarcastic smile as she crossed the room and opened the doors and walked up the long corridor with no real idea of where she was going. Hospitals always seemed exactly the same, lots of long neutral coloured corridors with nondescript doors leading to mysterious rooms. She looked up and saw some signage indicating that the operating theatre was further on and she continued walking, as she did she noticed that some of the medical staff were sneaking looks at her and she began to feel uncomfortable.

At the end of the corridor she walked through another set of double doors and saw an empty reception desk and an empty waiting room and sighed as she looked around for any information. It was then she saw David through the glass window of another door and approached him. As she did so she noticed he’s troubled expression and realised that he was stood in front of a large plate window watching the operation take place.

Emma always thought she was reasonably good with blood and gore, she watched medical and crime dramas and had seen a few murder scenes in her life but all of that seemed to vanish when she stood beside David and looked in at the operation.

Doctor Stott was barely recognisable in light blue scrubs, hat, mask and protective glasses as she used various metal implements on the open space that was Regina’s abdomen. Two other nurses assisted the doctor, one was studying readings and the other was handing equipment to the doctor.

“She’d been stabbed six times,” David whispered as he detachedly watched the operation, “massive loss of blood and internal bleeding.”

Emma looked at her father, it was still so new and strange to think of the young man as her father but suddenly she felt closer to him and worried for him as his pale complexion and shaky voice showed his shock at the situation.

He coughed to cover the breaking of his voice, “t-they are patching her up, repairing the internal wounds and..” he shook his head, “they think it will be another hour..”

“Okay,” Emma said with a calmness she didn’t necessarily feel, “I found the murder weapon.”

David looked at her with a surprised smile, “good, that will help to track the culprit.”

Emma nodded her agreement and looked around the empty observation room, “has there been any trouble?”

David shook his head in the negative, “no, one of the nurses left and was replaced by her,” he pointed at the woman, “I don’t recognise her but she’s been in there for over an hour now and everything seems to be fine.”

They both watched the operation in silence, each lost in their own thoughts as the doctor slowly and meticulously worked on fixing the injuries. Emma looked at Regina’s passive and pale face, her eyes were sealed closed with surgical tape and a tube and mask were protruding from her mouth.

“Did you see Mary Margaret?” David asked softly.

“Yes, she’s in the waiting room with Henry,” Emma told him without looking away from Regina’s face.

“It shocked her,” David said before clarifying, “when I told her, she was very taken aback.”

Emma frowned, “surely after all their history she wouldn’t be..”

David’s low chuckle halted Emma’s sentence and he shrugged, “I don’t get it, I really don’t.. after everything we all went through.. but Mary Margaret will always care for Regina. In the early days Regina was a good mother to her..”

“So not an evil step-mother?” Emma asked.

“No,” David shook his head, “not at all, she doted on Snow. Regina wasn’t happy in her marriage to Leopold, Snow’s father, so she ended up spending a lot of time with Snow. Even if she did claim to hate her for ruining her life, she had plenty of opportunities to kill Snow over the years but she never did. It wasn’t until Rumplestiltskin got involved that she really began to turn dark.”

“Sounds complicated,” Emma let out a small sigh.

“Very,” David agreed, “Mary Margaret.. loves and forgives like no one I’ve ever known,” he smiled.

“Well, she is Snow White,” Emma smiled in return briefly before saying, “there’s a lot of animosity towards Regina in the hospital..”

“Agreed,” he said solemnly.

“I’m worried about her recovery,” she gestured at the operation, “if she survives, I mean..”

“I know what you mean,” he sighed, “I’ve been thinking the same thing, there are a few people here who would love to take a pot shot at her while she is unable to defend herself.”

“Exactly,” she concurred, “she can’t go into the usual ward, we’re going to have to find her a room.”

“Away from everything,” David added.

“I’m going to stay,” Emma said determinedly.

“Here?” David looked at her in surprise, “with Regina?”

“Yes,” Emma nodded, “I can’t risk that someone won’t try and finish the job and most of the medical staff here would probably help!”

David seemed to consider this before agreeing, “we’ll take it in shifts, you can’t stay here permanently..”

Emma smiled at the offer and knew it would be pointless attempting to convince him otherwise so just accepted it silently.

“Something else to consider..” David sighed as he watched Doctor Stott threading a large needle, “there are very few nurses who are going to agree to help during her recovery, these two have already said that they will assist with the operation but nothing further.”

Emma turned away from the observation glass as it became a little too gruesome for her to watch, “well, I have no idea how to look after someone who’s just had major surgery, any ideas?”

“Doc?” David queried with a smile.

“The dwarf?” Emma raised an eyebrow.

“He delivered you,” David replied with a grin.

Emma waved her hands to remove the image from her brain, “no, no, I’d rather someone with some actual medical experience.”

“I’ll speak to the staff and will see if there is anyone we can trust,” David said.

“There must be someone who doesn’t hate her guts,” Emma muttered and rolled her eyes at David’s unconvinced expression.

Chapter 8

An hour later and an exhausted looking Doctor Stott removed her blood soaked gloves and mask and disposable cover and grabbed a bottle of water from a fridge in the observation room and took a long swig of cool liquid. Emma looked at her patiently waiting for the outcome of the operation.

“She’ll live,” Doctor Stott finally said, “but it will be a long and painful recovery for her.”

“But she’ll live?” Emma clarified and felt enormous relief wash over her as Doctor Stott nodded and drank some more water, “any.. like permanent issues or anything?”

“No, she was incredibly lucky, the blade missed anything too important,” Doctor Stott replied as David entered the room again.

“She’s going to be fine,” Emma quickly told him and he smiled in relief.

“Thank you, Vanessa,” he said as he warmly took her hand and shook it with gratitude.

“I assume you have found a safe room for her, Charming?” Vanessa asked him.

“Yes, the last room on the first floor,” he replied with a nod.

Vanessa cocked her head to one side and thought about it for a moment, “yes, that will be out of the way enough, is someone staying with her?”

“I am,” Emma said quickly.

“Well, Sheriff, there’s a few things you should know,” Vanessa said with a serious tone, “none of the staff who are in the hospital will be willing to care for her. Many of the nurses have left with all the hysterics about the curse breaking..”

“Why are you still here?” Emma asked, she had seen the mania of some people and the help centre that Ruby, Blue and Archie were manning.

Vanessa shrugged, “the curse broke but we’re all still here, it makes sense that before long people will return to their Storybrook lives, I figured I might as well stay where I might be needed. And a good thing I did..”

“You think the others will come back?” Emma asked.

“I’m sure they will, there’s been talk that people can’t leave the town.. something about their memories being affected if they cross the line?” Vanessa frowned towards David who nodded that the rumours were true, “people will wish to return to something familiar, to keep busy..”

“And you think some of those people might help to care for Regina?” David questioned.

“Yes, one or two of them might be sympathetic to her,” Vanessa said, “but at the moment there is no one.”

“What do we need to do?” Emma asked with a heavy swallow.

“She is still under heavy anaesthetics,” Vanessa said, “it will be at least another hour until she wakes up. It’s not usual procedure to allow a patient out of theatre until they have woken up fully but my support staff refused to stay any longer.”

“So, she’s still not out of the woods?” Emma sought clarity.

“It’s hard to say, different people react differently to anaesthesia,” Vanessa admitted, “someone will need to be with her when she wakes

up, she could suffer with nausea, shivering or confusion. She will be very weak and will need assistance and reassurance.”

“Okay,” Emma shifted from foot to foot like she was ready to take action, “and.. if she’s sick or something do I need to call you?”

“No, you need to provide her with a receptacle,” Vanessa said, “prolonged vomiting would need to be flagged up.”

“You mentioned confusion?” David asked.

“Not unusual considering the circumstances,” Vanessa said, “her most effective medicine is rest, if she is confused then she will need to be reassured of her safety and convinced to rest. Not an easy task with Regina, I’m afraid.”

David and Emma looked at each other as if they weren’t quite sure what to do next and Vanessa sighed and pointed through the observation glass, “feel free to take her at your leisure, the elevator is just to the left. I’ll be back to check on her tomorrow lunchtime.”

The father and daughter duo watched as Vanessa left the observation room and walked out of the waiting area and back into the main part of the hospital. With hesitant steps they entered the operating theatre both looking around at the bloodied instruments and cotton swabs that lay abandoned. Regina lay still on the operating table and they both looked around in confusion for a way to move her, eventually David spoke up, “I’ll.. get a trolley or something,” Emma nodded and he hurriedly left the room.

Emma looked back at Regina, the suit and blouse she had been wearing when Emma carried her out of the mansion were gone and instead Regina wore a plain blue hospital gown which. The surgical tape was removed from her eyes and the tube was gone from her mouth so now she simply looked like she was asleep, albeit in a hideous hospital gown and with the palest complexion Emma could imagine.

David loudly returned with a patient trolley and Emma stood to one side as he pulled the portable bed up beside Regina's still form.

"We'll need to both do this in a way that doesn't move her too much," David pointed out and Emma agreed.

It ended up that David took the majority of the weight of Regina's torso and Emma lifted the brunette's bare legs without too much hassle. After that Emma pushed the trolley while David pulled and steered towards the elevator, once they were inside David spoke, "once we get her into bed you get her settled and I'll get Mary Margaret and Henry."

"I don't think either of them should see her like this," Emma admitted as she looked at the former strong woman looking so weak and helpless.

"I don't think they'll take no for an answer," David pointed out as the doors opened and they pushed the trolley up the corridor.

"True," Emma said as she turned into the room David had found, "maybe I can be creative with the lighting and we can get them in and out quickly. I certainly don't want them here when she wakes up if there's any chance she's going to be as bad as Doctor Stott suggested."

"Agreed," David said as he pointed to the bedding in a gesture for Emma to pull the sheets down so they could get Regina into the bed. Emma pulled back the thick and unforgiving hospital sheets and then helped David to lift Regina into the bed. He pushed the trolley out of the room, "I'll go and get them now.. do what you can," he said with a grimace.

Once he was gone Emma turned to look at Regina with a sigh as she wondered how on earth she was going to make her look less critically ill without a team of Hollywood makeup artists. She pulled the sheets up and tucked them up around Regina's neck and tentatively brushed some hair from the brunette's face and attempted to flatten the rest of the hair with her palms. She then lowered the blinds and tilted them to

let only a small amount of light in and turned on the small bedside lamp and turned it towards the wall so there was a muted light in the room.

She pulled up an old plastic chair and sat down and looked at Regina's quiet form as she waited for Mary Margaret and Henry.

Chapter 9

It was the fast squeaking of Henry's shoes that alerted Emma to the boy's impending arrival and she quickly exited the room and waited for him outside the door. A little further down the corridor Mary Margaret and David were also approaching and Emma took a deep breath and crouched down to speak to Henry.

"She's not awake yet," Emma said softly and Henry nodded his understanding, "and she has literally just come out of surgery so she still looks quite ill."

"Okay," Henry said impatiently as he attempted to peak around her to see into the room. She knew that there was little chance that she would be able to adequately prepare him for what he was about to say so simply nodded and stepped to one side and watched as he rushed in.

As she suspected he immediately paused at the end of the bed and slowly approached the side of the bed with trepidation as his eyes took in the pale complexion of the woman who he had always known to be strong and full of energy.

"She'll be okay, Kid," Emma said as she came and stood behind him and put a hand on his shoulder.

"What's wrong with her?" Henry asked and Emma realised that the sheets were covering her wounds and therefore showing no signs of her injuries.

"Henry, I.." Emma started.

"I want to know," he said as he turned and looked up at her with a sad yet determined face, his eyes sparked with strength. At that moment David and Mary Margaret entered the room and Mary Margaret looked

upon Regina with distress as she slowly approached the opposite side of the bed with tears forming in her eyes.

Emma looked down at Henry again who wasn't backing down and she knew she had to tell him, she couldn't keep it a secret much longer. She knelt down and looked up into his eyes and placed her hand on his cheek, "she was stabbed," she whispered and saw the news shock Henry to the core.

"W-where?" Henry shakily asked.

"Her stomach," Emma replied, "but the doctor has patched her up and now she just needs lots of rest and time to heal.

Henry shakily turned around and leant on the side of the bed with his face centimetres away from Regina's and allowed a few tears to roll down his cheeks.

"What if they come back?" Henry breathed.

"Then I'll arrest them," Emma replied, "I'm going to be here every second until your Mom is better."

Mary Margaret's eyes flicked up to Emma in surprise, "you're staying here? At the hospital?"

"Yes," Emma replied, "until we know who did it someone needs to stay with Regina at all times.."

"I want to stay too," Henry said and stood up and looked at Emma beseechingly.

"I'm sorry, Henry, that's not a good idea," Emma said apologetically, "you need to stay with Mary Margaret, okay?"

Henry looked like he was about to argue when David spoke up, "I'm going to need your help, Henry. With the curse breaking people are getting restless and we need to calm people down."

“But what can I do?” Henry asked with a frown to his newly-discovered grandfather.

“I need you to help me, to be my eyes and ears in the town, there’s a lot to do when you’re running a kingdom,” David said sincerely and Emma smiled her thanks at him for distracted Henry.

“I’ll keep you updated,” Emma told him, “I promise..”

Henry considered it for a moment and looked at Regina with a torn expression but eventually nodded his head, “okay, I’ll stay with Mary Margaret and David..”

“Good,” Emma nodded, “say goodbye to your Mom for now and I’ll call you before you go to bed.”

Youth and shock allowed Henry to forget the troubles he had experienced with Regina and all he could think about now were the good times and the fact he didn’t want to see her like this ever again. Approaching the bed he gently kissed her forehead and whispered a goodnight and promised he would be back to see her soon.

David led Henry out of the room and Emma approached Mary Margaret, “you okay?”

Mary Margaret shook her head forlornly, “we tried so hard to destroy each other for so many years.. but when I heard her voice on the phone I.. I felt this fear, this real terror that I had lost her. Is that strange?”

“No, she’s been a big part of your life, even if you hated her,” Emma said.

“I don’t think I ever really hated her, I hated what she did and I hated what she’d become but I don’t think I actually hated Regina,” Mary Margaret admitted, “that probably makes me weak. She’d think so.”

“I wouldn’t judge yourself on Regina’s standards,” Emma admitted with a small chuckle.

Mary Margaret grinned, “probably best..” she paused for a few moments, “is she.. going to be okay?”

“I think so,” Emma nodded, “time will tell, but for now she needs rest and so do you.”

Mary Margaret reached up and smoothed Regina’s hair with a small smile before quickly embracing Emma and then leaving the room, closing the door behind her. Emma sat down on the hard plastic chair and leaned forward to put her head in her hands as she released a long breath in an attempt to exhale the stresses of the day and beyond.

The realisation that the curse was real, the cold-blooded panic at Henry’s near-death experience, the discovery of Regina’s body. It had all amounted into one long nervous breakdown in the making and Emma could feel the stress in her body buzzing, the tension in her shoulders was so taught she wondered if she even had a neck anymore or if it had sunk into her body.

Just as she thought she might have a moment of peace and quiet to herself she heard something she had been both waiting for and dreading in equal amounts, the sound of Regina waking up.

Chapter 10

Emma hurried over to Regina's bedside as she watched the brunette gently loll her head from side to side as she fought the after effects of the anaesthesia. Chocolate coloured eyes gently fluttered open and suddenly Regina took in a deep gasp of breath and with panic attempted to free her arms from the restrictive hospital sheets.

"Whoa, calm down," Emma said as she attempted to hold Regina still.

Regina wildly struggled against the pressure and Emma could see fear etched in the brunette's tense features and knew that fighting her was not going to help so she quickly adjusted her tactic and let go of the older woman.

"It's okay, you're safe, you're safe," Emma said softly as she held her hands up to show she was no threat.

Regina's eyes darted around the room in terror as she attempted to acclimatise herself, "wh.." she breathed as she suddenly winced and held a hand to her stomach, "oh.."

"Try not to move," Emma pleaded, "you've just come out of surgery."

"Surgery?" Regina frowned and then squinted at Emma as if only then realising she was there, "Miss Swan?"

"Hi," Emma forced a smile.

"Where am I?" Regina's tone started to turn dark and Emma knew that now was not the time for a sarcastic comment about it being obvious where she was.

"You're in hospital, you were attacked, do you remember?"

Regina was wincing and holding onto her stomach with one hand while her glazed eyes distractedly looked around the room as if confirming that she was indeed in the hospital and it wasn't all some trick.

"Someone.. helped me?" Regina said uncertainly.

Emma felt her heart clench as she understood that Regina had never expected anyone to come to help her and had every intention of being left to die in her own hallway.

"I found you and brought you here," Emma said without making eye contact, "one of the doctors, Doctor Stott? She agreed to operate."

Emma didn't need to say that the other medical staff were entirely against the concept of helping the Evil Queen as the inference hung heavily in the room.

"Henry?" Regina asked tentatively, almost as if she were afraid to hear the answer.

"Was very worried about you," Emma admitted, "he has been at the hospital but he's gone now, he'll be back in tomorrow.."

"Does he.. does he know?" Regina looked at Emma with dread.

"He knows some of it," Emma confessed, "he wouldn't rest until he knew at least the basics. Speaking of which," Emma gently perched herself on the edge of the bed and looked down at Regina, "I need to ask you a few questions, starting with who attacked you."

"I don't know," Regina said as her eyes focused on something on the ceiling.

"Yes, you do," Emma said.

"I don't remember," Regina looked at Emma with resolve.

"I think you do remember, who are you protecting?" Emma said.

“N-no one,” Regina stammered.

“What’s wrong?” Emma asked with a frown.

“Nothing, I’m f-fine,” Regina stammered again.

“You’re lying to me,” Emma said with frustration, “for God’s sake, Regina, do you have any idea that state I found you in? I thought you were dead! You were stabbed six times, you had internal bleeding!”

“You should have left me!” Regina hissed back but her teeth chattered as she spoke and Emma looked at her with a raised eyebrow as she stood up and regarding Regina curiously.

“Are you cold?” Emma asked softly but the question answered itself as Regina began to shiver. Emma rolled her eyes and walked over to a large cupboard and opened the doors as she sought out extra blankets, “why didn’t you say anything? Is it that hard to admit you need help?”

Regina didn’t reply and Emma pulled out a thick blanket and turned to noticed that Regina was really shivering so Emma quickly placed the blanket over the brunette and tucked the blanket gently around both her sides.

“Any better?” Emma asked.

“No,” Regina admitted.

Emma regarded her with a frown and went to the cupboard and got another two blankets and placed both of them over Regina as well.

“Are you trying to kill me by crushing me to death?” Regina asked softly.

“I don’t want you dead,” Emma said seriously, it was too soon to joke about such things for the blonde.

Once Emma had finished tucking the extra blankets around Regina she was relieved to see that the shivering had begun to dissipate and sat

back on the edge of the bed and looked down at Regina who was anxiously looking away from the blonde.

“Who was it?” Emma tried again.

“I don’t know,” Regina bit out.

“Fine,” Emma sighed, “protect your attempted murderer..”

“Miss Swan..” Regina said quietly.

“Have them thing they got away with it..” Emma continued.

“Miss Swan..” Regina repeated carefully.

“Or even better maybe they’ll come back and finish the job off, eh?” Emma laughed half-heartedly.

“Emma,” Regina said suddenly causing Emma to look at her with a frown as she realised something was up, “I.. I feel sick,” Regina admitted.

Emma slid off of the bed quickly and picked up one the disposable cardboard sick bowls she had seen in the cupboard and brought it over to Regina and slid one arm under the brunette’s upper back and helped her to sit up a little as she held the bowl with the other hand.

“Are..” Regina breathed deeply, “are you planning.. to.. to w-watch?”

“Just accept that someone is helping you and throw up in the damn bowl,” Emma said quietly.

A moment later Regina did as she was told and Emma looked away in a useless attempt to give her some privacy. Thankfully it was soon over and Regina fell limp into Emma’s arm and Emma lowered her back down to the bed gently. Regina held her stomach and winced at the pain that was caused by putting pressure on those muscles.

Emma silently left the room and placed the bowl in a contamination waste bin she had seen earlier and quickly returned to the room where Regina had shifted onto her side in the foetal position. Regina watched as Emma closed the door and sat on an upholstered chair in the corner of the room and removed her boots and her leather jacket.

Regina frowned at her, “you’re staying?”

“Yep,” Emma said simply.

“Why?” Regina puzzled.

“Get some rest, Regina,” Emma said softly as she draped her leather jacket over her front and leant her head back and closed her eyes.

Chapter 11

Half an hour of Regina's squirming and delivering sharp intakes of breath went by before Emma finally spoke again, "you really aren't going to ask for any help are you?"

"I'm fine," Regina replied through gritted teeth.

"Really?" Emma asked as she stood up and put her leather jacket back on, "because from over here you look like you're in agony."

Regina closed her eyes in an effort to ignore the blonde, she had little other choice because she was in too much pain to even consider moving to face away.

"I'm going to get help," Emma declared as she opened the door and took a step out into the corridor. She paused on the threshold and looked back at Regina and then up and down the corridor as she debated whether or not it was a good idea to leave the brunette unattended.

At that moment she saw a woman rushing along the corridor towards her, she was dressed in the dark blue outfit of a hospital nurse and was easily in her sixties with short grey hair.

"Where is she?" the nurse cried out in panic.

"Who are you?" Emma asked as she placed herself between the oncoming woman and the doorway to Regina's room.

"Where is she?" the nurse repeated as she approached Emma. By now Emma could easily see that the older woman wasn't a threat, she seemed genuinely concerned and wiggled her way through between Emma and the doorway and marched into the room.

“Oh, sweet child,” she said as she saw Regina’s prone form, “what have they done to you?”

The nurse placed her hands on Regina’s face and pushed hair away gently as she examined her carefully. She looked up and looked around the room quickly, “no pain medication? No drip?”

Emma looked around and shrugged in confusion, “er, no?”

“Are they trying to kill her?” the nurse shook her head, “after everything that’s happened she needs to be on pain medication, she must be in agony!”

“I’m sorry,” Emma said as the nurse pushed past her and left the room and walked into the corridor, “but who are you?”

“Clara,” the nurse said as she used a swipe card to open a room further up the corridor and entered the room leaving the door to slam shut behind her. Emma stared at the door for a few moments before shaking her head and walking back to Regina’s room.

“Who is that?” Emma asked Regina.

“Clara Hall,” Regina whispered through clenched teeth.

“And she is?” Emma pushed in frustration.

Regina mumbled something and Emma crouched down beside her and requested, “again?”

“She was my nanny,” Regina sighed.

Emma was taken aback and blinked a few times, “oh, so.. so we can trust her, right?”

“I believe so,” Regina said.

“Come now, Sheriff, out of the way,” Clara said as she came back in with a machine and wheeled it over to the other side of Regina’s bed

and plugged it in and started to push buttons, “I came as soon as I heard,” she said conversationally to Regina, “I never should have left you.”

Emma watched the surreal scene unfolding in front of her and felt oddly out of place when the short older woman knelt on the edge of the bed and with practiced ease assisted Regina into a more comfortable sitting position, “you don’t want to crouch up like that, it will hurt more,” she said gently.

“Can I help?” Emma asked.

“You can stand back,” Clara said with a shake of the head, “she’s had quite enough of your care!”

Emma opened her mouth to argue with the woman but realised she had no idea what to say, clearly Clara had decided that Emma was an enemy and there wasn’t much Emma seemed to be able to do or say to prove otherwise.

Emma stood and watched as Clara fitted intravenous tubes to Regina’s arm and adjusted the equipment before pushing some more buttons on the machinery.

“What is that?” Emma asked.

“Fluids,” Clara said, “with the amount of blood she’s lost. Has she been sick?”

“Yes, about half an hour ago,” Emma said.

Clara shook her head as she fussed around Regina’s bed and removed some of the bedding, “why did they leave you in charge of her?”

“Because no one else would,” Emma said, “she was shivering,” she explained as she pointed to the blankets.

“And now she’s sweating away the few drops of fluids she had left in her,” Clara said as she threw the blankets to the floor and rearranged

the remaining bedding.

“Shouldn’t a doctor be administering this stuff?” Emma said as she pointed to the machinery.

“Wonderful idea!” Clara smiled sarcastically as she started peering around the room, “oh, except.. there doesn’t seem to be any here.”

Emma was really beginning to hate the woman and she looked at Regina to judge whether the brunette was finding her predicament amusing. Regina’s eyes were slowly closing and she looked like she was drifting off to sleep and Emma looked at Clara with concern, “is it okay if she sleeps?”

Clara looked up at Regina and nodded with a fond smile, “she needs sleep, she would have already been asleep if it wasn’t for the pain.”

Emma felt bad, “I.. I didn’t know.. Doctor Stott didn’t mention..”

Clara snorted a laugh, “great surgeon, terrible bedside manner. It’s amazing any of her patients survive,” she looked Emma up and down like she was attempting to size her up, “so you brought her in?”

“Yes,” Emma replied, “the ambulance refused to come so.. I.. I brought her here.”

“So, why are you still here?” Clara folded her arms.

“In case the person responsible comes back,” Emma said, “do you know who could have done something like this?”

Clara looked over at Regina’s now-sleeping form and sadly shook her head, “many people would have wanted this for her. They don’t see her how I see her, they don’t know the whole story.”

Emma laughed, “is there much back story? She cursed everyone to take away their happy endings because she was jealous of Snow White’s looks!”

Clara looked at Emma with a sad smile, “is that what you think? Tell me, Sheriff, you knew Regina for a while, you got to know her a little. Do you really think she is so vain?”

“Then what is the story?” Emma questioned.

“Not mine to tell,” Clara said.

Clara looked at Regina and then let out a sigh, “I have to go, if Whale realises I’ve been here there will be problems. I will be back first thing in the morning,” she walked over to the door before turning back to Emma, “look after her.”

Emma nodded as she watched the older woman leave and then she turned and looked at Regina and tilted her head quizzically to one side as she slowly approached.

“Regina?” Emma whispered gently.

When there was no answer Emma leant forward and carefully listened to be sure she could hear some signs of life in the brunette. When she was satisfied that she heard gentle breathing she crossed and exited the room, closing the door gently behind her as she got her mobile phone out of her pocket and rang Mary Margaret.

After one ring the phone was answered by Henry’s frantic voice, “h-hello?”

“Hey, Henry,” Emma smiled at hearing his voice, “just checking in. She’s doing good.”

“She’s awake?” Henry asked.

“She was, she’s sleeping again now,” Emma clarified, “she’s going to need a lot of rest to recover properly. A nurse has been in and she’s check her out and she’s doing good.”

“Mary Margaret said I can come and visit tomorrow, if it’s okay with you?”

“Sure, I think that will be a good idea,” Emma said, “could you do me a favour?”

“Sure?”

“Could you bring your book with you?”

“Sure, Emma, are you looking for something in particular?” Henry asked.

“Kinda,” Emma admitted, “I want to see if there is anything about Regina in there.”

“Yeah, there’s loads,” Henry told her.

“About Regina? Or the Evil Queen?” Emma asked, “I want information on before she was the Evil Queen but I don’t want to ask Mary Margaret or David just yet.”

“Why?”

“I just want to research it a bit first.”

“Sure, okay,” Henry said.

“Great,” Emma said, “can you put Mary Margaret on, I need her to bring some of my stuff from the apartment if I’m going to be staying here.”

Chapter 12

Emma wasn't entirely sure why but even after a terrible night of sleep she was, for some reason, pleased that Regina had not only slept solidly for the evening but had also regained some colour in her face.

As she stood in the connected bathroom she looked at herself in the mirror and realised that she was looking worse than Regina and had no excuse other than a poor night's sleep in a hospital chair. She'd done what she could with the limited hospital supplies she had found and slowly walked back into the room.

"You're still here," Regina commented groggily.

Emma's head snapped up, she hadn't been expecting Regina to be awake, "yes, I said I would be."

Regina smiled sadly, "your family aren't good with promises."

"Maybe I'm different," Emma commented as she sat back down on the upholstered chair and pulled her boots back on.

"Maybe you are," Regina agreed, her eyes were glazed and she seemed unfocused.

"Henry is coming by today," Emma said as she laced up the long boots.

"I don't want him to see me like this," Regina looked at her pleadingly, "tell him to come back another day.."

Emma frowned, she never thought that Regina would willingly push Henry away, "I don't think I'd have much luck convincing him of that."

Regina looked displeased and Emma continued, “you look fine, much better than yesterday.”

“It’s not about how I look,” Regina argued, “I don’t want him to be afraid, he’s a sensitive boy.”

“Well, regardless, he’s coming in and I doubt I can stop him,” Emma said, “he’s a stubborn boy.”

“Can’t imagine where he gets that,” Regina looked at Emma pointedly.

Emma laughed, “me? Seriously? You are calling me stubborn?”

“You can’t possibly be attempting to deny that you’re stubborn,” Regina almost laughed.

A tentative knock on the door halted their conversation and Emma looked up to see a nervous Mary Margaret peering in through the blinds that covered the window in the door.

“Ready?” Emma asked Regina.

“I’ll have to be,” Regina grouched as she attempted to sit up a little straighter.

Emma nodded and opened the door and Henry rushed past her, dumping his bag on the floor as she made a beeline for Regina with a wide grin on his face.

“Henry,” Regina smiled and held her arms out for him.

Henry gently leaned down and into her arms, “I missed you, Mom.”

Mary Margaret stepped into the room and Emma closed the door again and gratefully took the bag that her mother offered her, “great,” Emma smiled, “I’m going to quickly get changed.. can you stay?”

Mary Margaret nodded and looked hesitantly at Regina and Henry and took a couple of steps closer as Emma went into the bathroom and

closed the door behind her.

“Emma says you’re feeling a little better?” Mary Margaret asked softly.

Regina looked from Henry to Mary Margaret and nodded slowly, “yes, a definite improvement on yesterday.”

“Good, we were all worried,” Mary Margaret said seriously.

Regina looked at the younger brunette and whispered, “I wanted to thank you, Snow..”

Mary Margaret frowned in confusion and Regina explained, “for not hanging up.”

“Oh!” Mary Margaret suddenly understood, “I’m glad I didn’t..”

“Not as glad as I am,” Regina said seriously before looking at Henry again, “I’m sorry I scared you, Henry.”

“Did it hurt a lot?” Henry asked unhappily.

“That’s not important,” Regina said seriously, “have you been well? Have you been eaten properly?”

Henry rolled his eyes but smiled, “yes, of course..”

Emma came back into the room in a change of jeans and a new shirt looking like she had freshened up, “all okay in here?”

Everyone mumbled an agreement and then Mary Margaret took Emma to one side, “Emma, I’m sorry to do this to you but can Henry stay here with you for a couple of hours?”

“Er, I guess.. What’s up?” Emma asked quietly.

“David and I are holding a meeting with everyone in the town, we’re trying to calm people down and get everything back to normal. Since

the curse broke,” Mary Margaret turned to check that Henry and Regina were still engrossed in their own conversation and not listening, “everyone’s been a little crazy, we don’t know how to get back to the Enchanted Forest and we know that crossing the line is out. So all we can do is convince people to pick up their Storybrooke life again and work together as a town, as a community.”

“Sounds like a good idea,” Emma agreed.

Mary Margaret smiled her appreciation at Emma’s understanding, “David and I are meeting with a lot of people today to try to get things back to normal. It’s not fair to drag Henry around and, to be honest, I’m worried about what he might hear from some people. Granny has said she’ll pick him up after the town meeting and will watch him until we get back this evening.”

Emma nodded, “sure, it will probably be good for Regina to spend some time with him, there’s plenty that they need to talk about.”

The door to the room flew open, “okay, everybody out,” Clara announced as she walked in with a metal trolley laden with stuff.

“Who’s that?” Mary Margaret asked.

“Regina’s nurse, kinda,” Emma said with a sigh.

“Hello young man,” Clara said to Henry, “you must be Henry?”

“Yes..” Henry said uncertainly.

“Henry, this is Clara, she’s looking after me,” Regina introduced the woman and Henry’s face lit up into a smile.

“You’re looking a lot better today, child,” Clara smiled at Regina before turning to Mary Margaret and Emma, “come on you two, shift yourselves!”

Emma and Mary Margaret started to make their way towards the door and Clara looked at Henry, “could you wait outside with the Sheriff, I

need to help your mother with a few things and then you'll be able to come back in and see her."

Henry nodded and picked up his bag and gave Regina a small wave as he, Mary Margaret and Emma were ushered out of the door by Clara. Once the door was closed and the blind was yanked shut Mary Margaret looked at Emma, "friendly.."

"Trust me, compared to last night that WAS friendly," Emma said.

"Who is she?" Mary Margaret asked in confusion.

"Regina said she was her nanny?" Emma shrugged.

"Cool," Henry said, "she must have known Mom when she was little."

"Must have," Emma agreed.

"I have to go," Mary Margaret said as she looked at her watched, "Henry, Granny will come and get you soon, okay?"

"Sure," Henry said as he placed himself on a plastic chair in the corridor, clearly happy to be in the hospital rather than being dragged to meetings around the town.

Mary Margaret gave Emma a brief hug and hurried off up the corridor leaving Emma to flop in the chair beside Henry. Henry opened his bag and pulled out the book and laid it on his lap, "I did some research," he said officially, "and there's nothing in the book about Mom before she was the Evil Queen."

"Nothing at all?" Emma asked.

"No, is there something particular you're looking for?" Henry looked at her with a confused expression.

"I don't know," Emma admitted, "I just.. I just want to understand how someone can become the Evil Queen. Clara said something that made me think I don't really know much about what happened and if I don't

know then that affects my chances of finding the person who hurt Regina.”

Henry nodded, “that makes sense but if it’s not in the book then there’s only one other way to find out.”

“What’s that?” Emma asked.

“We have to ask Mom,” he shrugged.

Chapter 13

Clara was in with Regina for twenty minutes before she finally made a reappearance in the hallway. Emma couldn't explain why but she was relieved to see the older nurse, it wasn't as if she were keen to spend more time in the stuffy hospital room.

"Henry, you can go back in now," Clara said kindly and Henry smiled and quickly walked past Clara and into the room.

"And me?" Emma asked as she folded her arms and stared down Clara.

"You really intend to stay?" Clara looked at her with piercing eyes.

"Yes, I meant what I said," Emma told her.

Clara shook her head, "I just can't wrap my head around it.."

"Around what?" Emma sighed.

"The Saviour, wanting to help the Queen," Clara said, "you should be killing her not protecting her."

Emma balked at that, "you want me to kill her?"

"Of course not!" Clara argued and pulled the blonde further away from the room to ensure they couldn't be heard, "but that is surely how it is supposed to be."

"I'm not even sure I believe all this Saviour stuff," Emma admitted, "all I did is bring people's memories back and caused chaos, the curse isn't broken and Regina is sure as hell not going to die."

Clara looked at her thoughtfully for a few moments before nodding and acknowledging, “you did well in bringing her here, Sheriff. But whoever made an attempt on her life will come again and she is far too weak to defend herself.”

“I understand, I’m not leaving her alone,” Emma stated firmly.

“Good, I have had to increase the amount of pain medication she is on so she may become a little confused but that is normal. I will be back in a couple of hours with something for her to eat and drink, she can have water before then but nothing more,” Clara instructed as she quickly left.

Emma watched her go and frowned before shaking her head and going back into Regina’s room and closing the door behind her.

“What is there to say?” Regina asked Henry with soft exasperation.

Henry had pulled the plastic chair up to the edge of Regina’s bed and sat on it crossed legged leaning forward onto the bed. As Emma closed the door they both looked up at her, Regina seemed to bristle a little at her presence.

“Don’t mind me,” Emma said as she opened her bag and pulled out some headphones and plugged them into her phone, “I’m going to just close my eyes and listen to some music.”

She curled up in the upholstered chair that was sat in the corner of the room and put an earpiece in each ear and leaned her head back and closed her eyes. She neglected to turn any music on and a part of her felt bad for eavesdropping on the conversation but a bigger part of her wanted to know what the brunette was saying to Henry so she could step in if she needed to.

“Please, Mom, I wanna know,” Henry said to Regina.

“I don’t know what to tell you Henry, I’m a bad person, I..” the brunette faltered as a tear fell down her cheek, “I don’t see how giving

you some sob story of my childhood is going to redeem myself of my actions.. do you understand?"

"You don't need to redeem yourself to me," Henry told her, "you're my Mom.. and I'm sorry I haven't been great lately but you really upset me. You lied to me and made me think I was going crazy.."

Regina started to apologise but Henry shook his head to indicate he had more to say and carried on, "but we both did bad things and, no matter what, we are where we are now and you're my Mom and I'm your son but I feel like I don't know anything about you. I don't really know who you are and I don't want to believe that you're just the Evil Queen because I don't think that's all there is to you, it can't be."

"But what will dredging up the past achieve?" Regina asked softly, "I can tell you about myself without that.."

"I just want to know," Henry was insistent, "you're my Mom and I feel that I know the least about you," he paused, "I want to hear your side."

Although he didn't say it the inference was definitely there that he was referring to Mary Margaret and Emma would have smirked if she wasn't being so careful in schooling her facial features to pretend she couldn't hear.

It worked, "very well, Dear," Regina sighed, "what do you wish to know?"

"You never talk about your parents," Henry said inquisitively.

"No, I don't suppose I do," Regina said and let out a little sigh, "my mother was.. strict. She had a very specific idea of how she wanted my life to be and she.. moulded my life."

"What do you mean?" Henry asked.

"Well," Regina shifted in the bed, "she.. she used magic to.. ensure I did as she wanted."

“Like she made you do stuff?” Henry puzzled.

“More that she punished me when I did something she didn’t want me to do, something she felt was unladylike,” Regina confessed.

“How?” Henry pushed.

“Erm, well,” Regina paused and Emma desperately wished she could open her eyes and see the interaction playing out in front of her.

“Well, she would lift me in the air so I couldn’t move,” Regina said with a slight tremor in her voice, “or she would prevent me from leaving the house..”

There was a moment of silence and both Emma and Henry realised Regina wasn’t going to volunteer much more information.

“She sounds mean,” Henry stated and Regina snorted a small laugh.

“Yes, she was quite mean,” Regina agreed, “but my father, you would have liked my father, he was called Henry too.”

“Did you name me after him?” Henry asked excitedly, pleased to finally be connecting in some way with his mother.

“Yes I did,” Regina replied, “he was my best friend in many ways. He was very kind and loving.”

“Why didn’t he stop your mother?” Henry asked.

“He was afraid of her, we both were,” Regina said softly, “you see neither of us had magic but my mother did and she wasn’t afraid to use it to control us. Mainly me. She knew that if she used magic to punish me it would stop my father from disagreeing with her as he hated to see me upset.”

Emma felt herself shiver at the implication of abuse and hoped that neither of the Mills family noticed.

“Why was she like that?” Henry asked.

“When she was younger she wanted to be Queen, she believed that power was all important and love was weakness. She told me that many times,” Regina explained, “but she eventually married my father and her dreams of being Queen were over. But then she had me and she worked tirelessly to make me Queen.”

“Did you want to be Queen?”

“No, and I told her as much but she didn’t care,” Regina gave a low laugh.

“So, how did she make you Queen?” Henry puzzled.

“Well, if a lady is not born into a royal family then there is only one way she can become a Queen,” Regina explained and waited for Henry to catch on.

“To marry a King,” Henry understood, “Snow White’s father.”

“Exactly,” Regina said.

“So, how did that happen? Did you meet and fall in love?”

Emma already knew the answer to that and could just image the look on Regina’s face.

“No, we were never in love,” Regina disclosed, “there was only one person I was in love with,” Emma heard the tone of Regina’s voice change, it was light and happy and she could imagine the soft smile that was gracing her features.

“His name was Daniel,” Regina continued, “he worked in our stables, he taught me how to ride horses and we fell in love.”

“What happened to him?” Henry’s tone was concerned.

“He.. he ran away,” Regina replied.

“No he didn’t, I know that look, you’re lying, what happened to him, Mom?” Henry pleaded.

A small sob escaped Regina and quietly she confessed, “he died.. my.. my mother killed him, Henry.”

“Why?” Henry whispered in shock.

“I was engaged to the King but I was in love with Daniel and we were about to run away together,” Regina explained, “Snow White told my mother that I was in love with Daniel.”

Emma used all of her willpower to not give any indication that she was listening but in that moment it was very hard. Clara’s pitying look at the thought of the entire feud between Snow White and Regina being about vanity suddenly became clear. She wanted to jump up and ask questions that Henry wasn’t asking, she wanted answers and clarity but she knew that Regina would never speak to her about such things so she continued to remain still.

“I don’t get it.. why would she do that? How did you get engaged to the King?” Henry asked.

Regina let out a breath, “well, my mother knew that the King and his daughter would be visiting nearby. When I was out riding with Daniel one day I heard a young girl screaming, she had lost control of her horse and it was running out of control. I rode after her and pulled her from the horse. That girl was Snow White.”

There was a pause and Emma wondered if Regina was lost in thought at the memories.

“My mother had set it up, I didn’t know that for some time. She knew the King had been looking for a new wife. But he didn’t really want a wife for himself, he wanted a mother for Snow. The King heard of how I rescued his daughter and proposed marriage, my mother accepted,” Regina said succinctly and Emma knew she was attempting to keep her emotions in check for Henry’s sake.

“You’d never even met him before?” Henry asked in surprise.

“No, that’s how things were done back in my world,” Regina explained.

“But.. wait,” Henry sounded lost in thought, “if he was Snow White’s father.. and you aren’t that much older than her..”

“He was sixty seven,” Regina answered his unasked question, “I was nineteen.”

Emma’s hand curled into a fist at the thought as Henry verbalised her feelings succinctly with an “urgh” sound.

“Indeed,” Regina said neutrally.

“But why did Snow White tell your mother about Daniel? Why did you tell Snow White about Daniel?” Henry asked.

“I didn’t,” Regina countered, “she caught us.. kissing,” Emma could imagine the blush on Regina’s cheeks at admitting to her son that she was caught kissing a boy.

The smile on Henry’s face was easily conveyed in his tone, “go Mom!”

“Henry,” she lightly admonished him with a chuckle before continuing the story, “she was young, in fact she was your age but a lot more innocent of the world and definitely more spoilt, so she didn’t understand the concept of an arranged marriage. She thought I should tell my mother about Daniel and that she would be happy for me and allow me to marry Daniel instead of the King. I thought I’d managed to convince her not to tell my mother but..”

“So, she told your mother because she wanted you to be happy with your true love?” Henry asked quietly.

“I suppose,” Regina confessed, “but that still doesn’t excuse her for breaking her promise and giving up my secret.”

Henry made a non-committal noise as he clearly thought, as Emma did, that the breaking of that one promise was not enough to condemn Snow White to death. It was clearly Regina's mother who was at fault, she was the one who killed Daniel. Snow White was a child and couldn't be held responsible for what happened.

Emma understood more than Henry that Regina was probably transferring her feelings onto Snow White, blaming her for everything that subsequently happened after the day she met the young girl. Which led Emma to understand that Regina had probably had a very unhappy marriage and life if she was so full of hate that she was willing to kill her step-daughter in revenge.

"What was the King like?" Henry asked.

"I don't want to talk about Leopold," Regina mumbled uncomfortably.

"Why?" Henry asked with a childlike lack of understanding.

"Henry, I just.." Regina breathed deeply, "it wasn't a happy time in my life."

"Was he horrible? Like your Mom?" Henry pressed.

"He.. he was a very kind and gentle man to all his subjects," Regina said with practiced diplomacy, "he loved Snow more than anything, doted on her and treated her like the Princess she was."

"But what about you?" Henry asked.

"I was invisible as far as Leopold was concerned," Regina said softly, "he wasn't over the death of his first wife, he loved her very deeply. I felt like a prisoner in the castle, I wasn't allowed to leave except with Leopold and he rarely wanted me to accompany him anywhere."

"You were like a trophy wife, eh?" Henry understood before adding, "what? I watch TV."

“Henry, I’m very tired,” Regina told him softly, “can we talk more another time?”

“Sure, I’m staying here with you and Emma,” Henry tried his luck.

“I’m pretty sure Widow Lucas is coming to look after you shortly,” Regina told him.

“But I want to stay here with you,” Henry complained.

“Well, I’ll only be sleeping so you won’t be missing a lot,” Regina pointed out.

“But Mom..” Henry started.

“Henry,” Regina said firmly, “what did I tell you on that phone call?”

“Education is important?” Henry quizzed.

“Yes, but I was more referring to what I said about Emma,” Regina’s voice lowered but Emma could still hear her clearly.

“To listen to her because she knows what’s best for me,” Henry repeated monotonously.

“Exactly and all the other things I said,” Regina muttered, “those were probably important too.”

“Mom? Are you okay?” Henry asked.

“Hmm? What’s that?”

“Are you okay?” Henry repeated.

“Oh, yes, sorry, I’m just suddenly feeling a little tired is all,” Regina said and Emma realised that the pain medication was starting to kick in.

“Mom?” Henry tried again.

“Henry?” Regina said distractedly.

“Mom, do you love me?” Henry asked.

“Of course, Henry, you’re my prince,” Regina said with a slight drawl.

“Good, because I love you too and love is not weakness, Mom. Love is strength and you taught me that,” Henry told her resolutely.

Regina didn’t answer and Emma couldn’t help but open her eyes to see what was happening, she was greeted by the sight of Regina’s eyes fluttering closed as the brunette fell asleep. Emma locked eyes with Henry and he gave her a tight smile and they shared a knowing look.

Chapter 14

The door to the hospital room slowly opened and Granny shuffled in her eyes scanning the room from Henry and Emma sat next to each other having a quiet conversation over to Regina who was asleep in her bed.

The last time Emma had seen Granny the older woman had a crossbow casually slung over her shoulder and was attempting to help David and Mary Margaret keep some order in the town.

"Oh my," Granny said sadly as she looked upon Regina, "they told me what happened but.. she looks so very small.."

"She looks a hundred percent better than she did yesterday," Emma admitted, "thank you for taking Henry today."

"My pleasure," she smiled at Henry and he smiled back, "he can help out at the diner and I can pay him in waffles."

"With ice cream?" Henry asked, his eyes lighting up.

"Of course!" Granny confirmed with a chuckle.

"Get your stuff together, Kid," Emma said, "I'll see you again tonight."

Henry threw the straps of his bag over his shoulder and then threw himself into Emma in a big embrace, "look after Mom for me," he said seriously before letting her go and casting a glance over at Regina as he walked to the door.

"Go and call the elevator, it takes forever, I just need to talk to Emma," Granny told him and he nodded and left the room.

Granny looked at Regina, "do you know who did it?"

"No," Emma shook her head, "literally could be anyone."

Granny nodded, "True that she has a lot of enemies but I'd like to think that not many people have the stomach to do that to another human being."

"She won't tell me who did it," Emma confessed.

Granny frowned and quickly checked the door to ensure Henry wasn't lurking, "but surely she must have seen her attacker?"

"Yeah, but she wouldn't say anything when I asked her before, is there anyone in the town that Regina would protect?" Emma quizzed.

After a few moments pondering the question Granny shook her head, "I can't think of anyone, there are people in Storybrooke that fought on the Queen's side but I can't think of anyone who she would protect if they turned on her like this. Is it possible that she really doesn't know who did it?"

Emma shrugged, "a frontal attack, multiple stab wounds, she didn't lose consciousness.. it's hard to believe that she didn't see something. If the person wore a mask then surely she would have said that. I don't know," Emma sighed, "I was just wondering if you knew anyone who fit the criteria.."

"Sorry I can't help," Granny replied with a shake of the head, "but if there is anything I can do?"

"Actually there is something," Emma grimaced, "Regina's house.. it still looks like the set of a horror movie, do you know anyone trustworthy who can go and clean it up?"

"What's the pay?" Granny asked shrewdly.

"Hundred and fifty?" Emma asked.

"Double that and I'll make sure it's done to her standard," Granny pointed to Regina.

"Two fifty?" Emma smiled that she was now bartering with Little Red Riding Hood's grandmother to clean the Evil Queen's house.

"Two seventy five," Granny folded her arms and looked up at Emma.

"Fine, just make sure it's done soon before anyone sees it, I don't want the local paper snooping around," Emma pulled a key out of her jacket pocket and handed it to Granny.

"Don't worry, I'll see to it," Granny said with a nod as she walked out of the room.

Emma returned to what she had started to refer to as her chair and hauled Henry's story book onto her lap and opened the big book on the third page and continued reading. She had an insatiable urge to now devour every piece of knowledge she could to help her learn more about Regina's reign as Queen in an attempt to find the attacker.

Chapter 15

Henry sat at the bar in Granny's and twirled the metal spoon around in his mug of hot chocolate as Ruby stacked mugs behind the bar.

"Ruby?" Henry asked distractedly.

"Yeah, Henry?"

"Did you ever see my Mom back in the Enchanted Forest, like, before she became the Evil Queen?"

Ruby gave a small laugh, "no, I didn't exactly move in those circles, I was mainly at home with Granny during that time."

"I guess there's a lot of people who want to hurt her, right?" Henry asked sadly.

Ruby put the mugs down and looked at him with a sad smile, "people are real angry at the moment," she explained, "but that doesn't mean they want to hurt her. Whoever hurt your Mom is nuts."

"Doctor Whale was going to strangle her," Henry pointed out.

"Doctor Whale isn't from the Enchanted Forest," Ruby said and then frowned, "in fact we're still not quite sure where he is from.. but Doctor Whale is in the minority. And with Emma looking after your Mom everything will be fine, people aren't going to cross Emma."

Henry nodded slowly and continued to stir his drink, Ruby was about to say something else when Granny called to her from the kitchen.

In the kitchen Granny pulled Ruby to one side and looked through the serving hatch to check Henry was still at the bar, "how would you like to make a hundred and fifty bucks?"

Ruby looked suspiciously at Granny, "doing what?"

"Emma needs the blood cleaned up at the Mayor's house, I'd do it but I can't leave the diner unattended," Granny explained.

Ruby shrugged, "sure, is it.. is it bad?"

"I think so," Granny nodded, "from what I heard she was stabbed several times and then dragged herself into the house."

"Jesus fucking Christ," Ruby muttered and shook her head.

"She did some terrible things, Ruby," Granny reminded her.

"No one deserves that, to be left for dead like that.. just makes me so angry."

"I know," Granny reached out and took her hand softly, "it worries me too because we know it's someone we know."

"Don't," Ruby stepped away, "I can't even stand to think about that. When do you want me to go and clean up the house?"

"After your shift if you can?" Granny asked.

Ruby looked at the clock on the kitchen wall, "sure, you'll watch Henry?"

"Yes, I have a few things to keep him busy until Snow gets back," Granny said, "the key's in the office on the desk."

Granny called out for Henry as she picked up a notepad, when Henry entered the kitchen she smiled at him, "Henry, when you've finished your hot chocolate I was wondering if you'd like to help with inventory?"

"I'm finished now," Henry said as he waved his empty cup at her.

She laughed, "I don't know where you put it, such a thin boy," she took the cup out of his hand and replaced it with the notepad and picked up a pen from the counter and gave that to him. She took him to one side and started to explain the dynamics of stock control within the diner and told him what he needed to count and what he needed to write.

For the next hour and a half Henry busied himself in the diner, performing a stock check and fixing a problem with the till that had been plaguing them for as long as they could remember. When Ruby finished her shift she walked into the office to grab the key to the mansion but it was gone, she checked under papers and looked on the floor in case it had been knocked off of the desk. Suddenly she thought to Henry and realised she hadn't seen him for a little while and ran into the main diner, she checked the room before entering the kitchen.

"Where's Henry?" Ruby cried.

"Isn't he out there?" Granny looked through the serving hatch.

"The key is gone," Ruby said as she grabbed her car keys and sprinted out the back door of the diner and quickly jumped into her car and threw it into gear. As she sped the short distance to the Mayor's house she realised how stupid they had been, of course Henry had been eavesdropping, he was Regina and Emma's kid.

She skidded to a halt outside the Mayor's house and kicked off her high heel shoes in the car when she noticed the front door was open. She ran as fast as she could, hoping against hope that she would get there in time and prevent Henry from seeing anything too graphic.

But it wasn't to be. As she opened the front door wider she saw the now half-dried pool of blood and could hear sobs nearby, "Henry?!" Ruby cried as she edged around the blood and into the main hallway.

She saw him sitting on the stairs, staring at another pool of blood where there also sat a discarded telephone, his hands covered his ears and he was rocking back and forth as tears fell heavily down his cheeks.

"Oh, Henry!" Ruby rushed to sit beside him and pulled him into a tight squeeze, "Henry, you shouldn't have come here," she whispered into his hair as she turned him around so he couldn't see the scene any longer.

"I just wanted to know," he spluttered through tears, "they wouldn't tell me anything."

"They wanted to protect you, Henry," Ruby said softly, "it's not that they don't trust you, or think you're not strong enough. It's that they love you and they want to protect you, hell, I'd want to protect Granny from seeing something like this and you know what a hard ass she is!"

"Who would do this?" Henry pulled back and looked at Ruby pleadingly, "I don't get it.. you're all supposed to be fairy tale characters, this isn't a fairy tale.."

"I don't know who did this, sweetheart," Ruby pushed his messy hair away from his face with both hands and held his head gently, "but I can promise you now that this is a small town and people won't protect whoever did this, Emma will find who did this and they'll be caught."

Henry's eyes started to roam towards the blood subconsciously and Ruby couldn't blame him as she also felt her gaze drawn to the horror surrounding them.

"Close your eyes," she instructed him and he did without question.

She stood up and grabbed his hand and led him out of the house and when they got outside she closed the door and locked it with the key that had been abandoned in the lock. Henry opened his eyes and looked at Ruby, "I wanna see my Mom.."

Ruby nodded, "sure, Henry, get in the car.."

Chapter 16

Emma wasn't really a people person. She wasn't someone who naturally knew what to do when someone cried, she wasn't someone who found it easy to hug people and she certainly didn't know what to do when Regina Mills was having a nightmare.

At first she had ignored it, pretended she hadn't heard anything but she was only kidding herself as ignoring a sleeping person when you're the only person in the room is fairly pointless. But as the slight whimpers had become more frequent and more pronounced she knew she couldn't allow the woman to suffer through it any longer.

Initially she had just coughed from her seat in the hope that would awaken the older woman or at the very least disturb her sleep enough to shake the nightmare. On the fifth cough Emma had realised that further action was required and she stood up and approached the bed, looking down at the woman who had caused her so much pain and misery since she arrived in Storybrooke.

"Regina," she said quietly.

The troubled look remained etched on the brunette's face, her eyes darting quickly under her eyelids and the almost imperceptible flinching from her hands continued.

"Regina, you're having a nightmare," Emma said unnecessarily just to make noise in the hope it would wake the older woman

Regina produced a sharp intake of breath followed by a frightened, "no, please," in such a breathy tone that Emma almost missed it despite standing over her. She placed her hand softly but firmly on Regina's shoulder and held gave her a small shake, "Regina, you're safe," she said a little louder than she had dared to speak before.

It worked, brown eyes appeared confused and unfocused as she looked up at Emma and then glanced around the room before settling on Emma's face again. When her breathing returned to normal Emma removed her hand from Regina's shoulder and gave her a small nod before returning to her chair silently.

Regina watched her wordlessly for several minutes while Emma attempted to appear engrossed in a magazine.

"How did you get me here?" Regina asked, her voice slightly unclear from the pain medication.

"I carried you," Emma said without looking up.

"How?" Regina asked.

"In a wheelbarrow," Emma deadpanned, refusing to look at the woman.

Regina was silent for a few moments.

"How did you get the key to the garage? Did you put it back?" Regina frowned as she looked around the room.

Emma looked up and watched as the confused woman looked around the hospital room for a garden wheelbarrow and suddenly looked guilty for being flippant.

"I carried you, on my own," Emma tried again.

Regina's eyes met hers, "but I'm a grownup."

Emma smiled despite everything, "yes, you are but you're a light grownup."

Regina seemed to be considering this and looked at the ceiling thoughtfully so Emma returned to her magazine.

It was ten minutes later when Regina spoke again, “you will send me the bill.”

Emma frowned, “the what?”

“The bill,” Regina explained as if she were talking to a child, “for your clothing.”

Emma continued to look confused and Regina added, “for cleaning. Or replacing. I don’t know if the blood will come out.”

“I won’t send you any bill,” Emma shook her head as if she thought Regina was speaking nonsense.

Regina didn’t reply and returned to staring at the ceiling. Emma got five minutes of blissful silence before Regina spoke again, “that cute little car will need to be cleaned as well.”

Emma chuckled but Regina seemed to not notice as she continued her ceiling staring contest. Regina’s head lolled to the side and she looked at Emma, “you’re just like your mother, beautiful and kind.”

Emma’s head snapped up to look at Regina who had now closed her eyes, “self-righteous little shit too,” the brunette slurred.

“I’m going to the bathroom,” Emma announced as she crossed the room and opened the door to the bathroom and firmly closed it behind her and leaned heavily on it. She didn’t think she could cope with medicated Regina for much longer it was getting uncomfortable. And Regina would no doubt want to kill her when she was a little more lucid and remembered what she had said.

Emma walked over to the sink and started to run the cold tap and looked at her face in the mirror. She supposed she did have Mary Margaret’s chin. She heard a noise from the room and turned the tap off and listened for a moment until she heard an over-exaggerated “whoopsie” from Regina and sighed and shook her head.

She turned the tap back on and began splashing her face with water as she tried to wash the boredom and irritation of the situation off of her face.

“What’s that for?” she heard Regina speak and turned off the tap and grabbed a towel off of the wall.

“That’s Emma’s chair,” she heard Regina garble and heard the noise of the heavy chair being dragged across the room.

Emma quickly attempted to push the door open but found she couldn’t move it at all due to the chair being wedged under the handle.

“Regina!” Emma hammered on the door.

Suddenly Emma heard the distant sound of Henry’s voice calling out, “Mom!” and the sound of his heavy boyish footfall coming down the corridor.

“Henry!” Emma shouted as she pounded loudly on the door, “Henry!”

Undistinguishable sounds from the next room continued and Henry’s voice began to get louder and Emma hammered harder on the door. Suddenly the door swung open and Ruby was stood there looking at her in confusion, “Emma?”

Emma rushed past the waitress and looked around the room in apprehension as she tried to figure out what had gone on. Henry was buried in Regina’s side with tears streaming down his face and Regina was holding him and looking just as dazed and confused she had been before. The window beside Regina’s bed was open and Emma sprinted around the bed to looked out of the window but she couldn’t see anything.

“Who was in here?” Emma asked Ruby.

“No one,” Ruby said, “I got here and heard you in there,” she pointed to the bathroom.

Emma looked at her in shock and then down at where Henry lay curled up beside Regina and then at Ruby.

“We need to talk,” Ruby said as she indicated her head towards the corridor.

Chapter 17

"I'm so sorry," Ruby said to a silent Emma after she explained what had happened with Henry.

Emma shook her head, "it's okay, he's a devious kid," she looked through the gaps in the blind at Regina and Henry who were still cuddling.

"I feel terrible," Ruby whispered, "it was really.. well, you know, you saw it.."

Emma nodded, "yeah, I know what you mean."

"Do you think someone was in the room?" Ruby asked as she followed Emma's gaze into the room.

"Unless Regina suddenly started speaking to herself and then locked me in the bathroom, opened a window and popped back into bed in time for you to arrive.. yeah, someone was in the room," Emma said angrily, "I'm the worst Sheriff ever, I should hand this fucking badge in. I don't deserve it."

"Whoa," Ruby put a gently hand on Emma's shoulder, "go easy on yourself."

Emma spun around, "Ruby, if you and Henry didn't turn up at that exact moment Regina could be dead by now. She's so out of it she probably would have helped! I'm supposed to be protecting her and I went to the bathroom to put cold water on my face because her chatter was annoying me, what kind of person does that make me?"

"You dropped your guard for one second," Ruby told her firmly, "you can't beat yourself up so much, Em, Henry really needs you now."

Emma took a deep breath and leaned on the window frame, suddenly she frowned, “Ruby, do me a favour?”

“Sure, what do you need?”

“Regina once used the hospital CCTV against me, I’m wondering if it can help me.. can you find out if there is any CCTV footage of this floor? Or anything that might be useful? I’d go but I’m not leaving this room for a second now,” Emma swore.

Ruby nodded, “yeah, sure I can speak to Leroy, he’ll know.”

“Wait,” Emma said, “I want to keep this between us..”

Ruby raised an eyebrow, “you think Leroy might have done this? Emma, we’re on the first floor, Leroy would die if he tried to climb down from here. You’re looking for someone young and fit and Leroy, as much as I love him, is neither.”

Emma started to chew her lip in agreement.

“And, he’s a dwarf, Regina would have multiple lacerations to the kneecaps if it had been one of the dwarves,” Ruby pointed out.

Emma laughed, “don’t,” she smiled.

“Sorry,” Ruby grinned back, “it’s true though..”

“Yeah,” Emma agreed, “okay, speak to Leroy but seriously no one else okay?”

Ruby gave a mock salute, “I’ll get right on it and I’m really sorry about Henry.”

“Thanks Ruby,” Emma gave her a reassuring smile before she walked back into the room.

Henry remained curled into Regina still in floods of tears and Emma realised for the first time how very young he was. Of course she knew

his age but children all progress at different rates and suddenly seeing Henry it pieces and cuddled into his mother like nothing else mattered suddenly made it hit home.

Regina looked at Emma in confusion as the medication continued to disorientate her. Emma gave her a small smile and then closed the open window, glancing around one last time just in case she had missed anything the first time.

She stood behind Henry and put a comforting hand on his shoulder, "I'm sorry you had to see that, Kid.."

"You're not mad at me?" Henry sniffled.

"No," Emma admitted, "it wouldn't do any good to be mad at you, I need you to trust me and be on my side. When I tell you that I don't think you should see something or know something I'm doing it for your own benefit, you know?"

Henry nodded, his head still nuzzled into Regina's side. Regina nodded her head too but her confused expression led Emma to believe that the brunette had no idea what was going on or why she was nodding.

"Henry," Emma said softly, "you're soaking your Mom's gown, do me a favour and go and dry your face, okay?"

Henry nodded and detached himself from Regina and walked around the bed and into the bathroom. Regina waved at him and Emma rolled her eyes as she leaned forward, "Regina, focus on me, please?"

Regina turned to look at Emma and smiled at her, "hi."

"Hi," Emma sighed, "Regina, who was in the room?"

"Norman," Regina said.

"Norman?" Emma asked quickly, "Norman who?"

“Bates,” Regina said with a drunken giggle as she made a stabbing motion with her hand and started making noises that resembled the iconic scene from Psycho. Emma grabbed her hand to stop her from doing the motion and shushed her.

“Don’t do that, you’ll upset Henry,” Emma whispered as she looked into the bathroom to see Henry blowing his nose, “who was in here?”

“Me,” Regina said and then frowned, “and Henry and Miss Lucas.”

“Regina, focus,” Emma said.

“Focus,” Regina whispered.

“Regina, who locked me in the bathroom? Who attacked you?” Emma asked.

“I can’t tell you that,” Regina said and shook her head.

“Regina, you have to tell me,” Emma demanded.

“No,” Regina’s eyes started look heavy, “it’s not his fault.”

“What do you mean?” Emma asked as she mentally wrote off half of the town’s population.

“You can’t blame him, he needs to be protected, he was trying to do the right thing,” Regina said as her voice started to slow down.

“Regina!” Emma grabbed the brunette’s shoulder and shook her to try to keep her awake, “you have to tell me, Regina!”

Regina raised her hand to Emma’s cheek and whispered, “so pretty,” and allowed her hand to drop from Emma’s cheek as she fell asleep.

“Is she okay?” Henry asked in concern.

Emma let out a deep breath and stood up and looked at him, “she’s on some serious pain medication, it’s making her a bit loopy,” Emma

admitted, “Henry, when you came in the room did you see anything weird? Was anyone in here? Anything out of place?”

“Why?” Henry asked as he looked nervously at Regina, “was someone in here?”

“Henry, did you see anything?” Emma repeated.

Henry thought for a moment before shaking his head, “no, I.. I didn’t really look.. I just went straight to Mom.. I’m sorry, Emma.”

“It’s okay, Kid,” Emma gave him a smile and walked around the bed and put her arm over his shoulder, “how do you fancy staying here with me and your Mom? You can be my Deputy, we’ll get an extra bed in here and we’ll take shifts, what do you think?”

“Really?!” Henry exclaimed, looking up at her with relief.

“Really,” Emma said with a smile.

Chapter 18

The next three hours passed in a blur of activity for Emma. She had borrowed a bed from another room and placed it against the wall in Regina's room, Doctor Stott had been to check on Regina and Clara had returned and convinced Regina to eat something slimy that was called food.

Henry had calmed down but still refused to leave Regina's side and Emma used the opportunity to have a discussion with Clara about the amount of pain medication Regina was on and the way it was affecting her. Clara hadn't been convinced but when Emma told Regina a knock knock joke and she giggled like a schoolgirl Clara had been forced to admit that maybe the dosage could be lowered a tad.

Ruby had returned with the disappointing news that the CCTV recorders had not been replaced since the curse broke and both security guards had decided to abandon their posts. The waitress apologised again about allowing Henry to see the mansion and said she was going to get over there and get it cleaned straight away.

Emma sat cross-legged on the new bed with her laptop on her lap as she logged into the Sheriff department's files and started to draw up a list of potential suspects. So far all she knew was the suspect was male and determined. She still couldn't figure out why Regina would be protecting anyone and any attempts Emma had made to find out the identity had been met with resistance no matter how medicated Regina was. At one point Regina had become upset that Emma was taking advantage of her while her brain was muddy, as she had referred to it. It was then that Emma decided to back off and investigate other avenues, despite the situation she hated the idea that Regina thought that of her.

Henry and Regina were playing a verbal word game and Emma couldn't help but smile at the complicated words that Regina was coming out with even with the medication still dulling her mind.

"Obviously," Regina said.

"Y," Henry thought for a moment, "yesterday."

"Very good," Regina smiled, "y again, yacht."

"Er," Henry paused and looked at Regina for help but she shook her head with a smile and Henry looked up at Emma who raised her hands to mime a capital T.

"T," Henry smiled and Regina looked at Emma with exasperation.

"You're helping him cheat," she admonished the blonde.

"You're coming up with difficult words to confuse a ten year old," Emma laughed.

"I'm helping him to learn," Regina countered.

"Terrific," Henry interrupted.

"Clown," Regina said as she continued to look at Emma with a raised eyebrow and a half smile.

"Noodles," Henry said quickly.

"Slow," Regina returned.

"Water.. oh, I've said that," Henry said as he brought his palm up to his forehead, "you win again, Mom."

Regina turned to look at Henry, "another round? As long as you stop asking Miss Swan to help you cheat."

“I’ll make it easy for you,” Emma said as she closed the laptop lid and placed it on the seat of the chair by the bed, “I’m going to have a nap now so Henry can sleep here tonight.”

“Like shifts?” Henry asked excitedly.

“Exactly,” Emma said, “you take the first shift, I’ll grab some sleep now.”

Emma got herself comfortable on the bed, laying on her side and facing the wall so she could attempt to shut out the chatter of the word game. Years of practice had helped Emma to develop the ability to fall asleep anywhere and at any time no matter what was happening, she was a light sleeper but getting to sleep had never been a problem for her. The sounds of Regina and Henry alternating words became distant and blurred as she felt herself drifting into a sleep filled with unanswered questions.

Chapter 19

Emma wasn't sure how long she had slept for but something was tugging her from her sleep and as she came back into the waking world she could hear Regina and Henry had moved on from their word game.

"So, what happened to your Mom?" Henry asked.

"She.. went to another land," Regina said carefully.

"Like a holiday?" Henry asked.

"Not exactly," Regina laughed.

"What happened?"

"Well," Regina hesitated, "you have to understand, Henry, my mother was a.. difficult woman. She had pushed me into a marriage I didn't want and she was holding me prisoner. I.. I was given the opportunity to.. stop her. And I took it."

"You sent her away?" Henry asked without judgement.

"Yes, I.. I met a powerful man, a man who taught my mother magic," Regina explained, "and I wanted to make sure I never turned into my mother."

"Mister Gold," Henry filled in the blanks, "Rumplestiltskin."

"Exactly," Regina agreed, "he showed me a way to use a magic mirror to.. send my mother to another world.. where she wouldn't be able to get back and hurt me ever again. I doubted that I would be able to do it but she came to my room and.. well.."

"What did she do?" Henry asked softly.

“She was complaining that the people in Leopold’s kingdom hadn’t taken to me,” Regina said, “it was silly really, I shouldn’t have let her get to me but I couldn’t help it. We argued and I pushed her through the mirror.”

“What happened to her, do you know?”

“Oh, she did very well for herself,” Regina chuckled, “she became the Queen she always wanted to be.”

“And she didn’t hurt you again,” Henry’s smile could be heard in his tone.

“Oh, she tried a few times,” Regina admitted, “she kidnapped my father and I had to go and rescue him. We had a few run-ins but luckily not many.”

“I’m glad she’s not in Storybrooke,” Henry said seriously.

“Me too, Henry,” Regina laughed lightly.

“Is Mister Gold evil?” Henry asked, “he seems a bit evil.”

Regina took a deep breath, “Rumple is.. very powerful and with great power comes a lack of care for other people.”

“Why did you bring him here when you cast the curse?” Henry probed.

“It was his curse,” Regina said, “it wasn’t until many years after I cast the curse that I began to understand that he wanted me, needed me, to cast this curse. He wanted to be here but couldn’t get here.”

“So, h-he used you?” Henry asked with a touch of anger.

“In a manner of speaking,” Regina replied, “but that doesn’t lessen what I did. I cast the curse.”

“But if he wanted to come here and he couldn’t do it himself then he made you do it, that’s his fault,” Henry explained his logic.

“Maybe,” Regina allowed, “but I did many terrible things in the old world, Henry. I can’t use the excuse that he made me do it, I’m responsible for my own actions.”

“No,” Henry said calmly but firmly.

“I’m sorry?” Regina sounded confused.

“I don’t think you are responsible,” Henry explained, “your Mom was really mean and she used magic to control you and that’s wrong. That’s like those adverts on TV about domestic abuse..”

“Henry..” Regina tried to interrupt.

Henry carried on regardless, “..and then she killed your true love and made you marry an old man who you didn’t even know. And then he was mean as well and they ignored you and you were like a prisoner and had no friends and no one to talk to. And then Mister Gold taught you magic even though you didn’t want to and then he made you do stuff that you didn’t want to. He persuaded you to use magic for bad stuff, he made you think it was okay to do bad stuff and you did it and then he made you do more bad stuff. He.. what’s the word, he.. manipulated you.”

“Henry..” Regina tried again.

“You just wanted to be happy,” Henry carried on, “you just didn’t know how to do it and he made you think that what you were doing was okay and that you’d be happy. But you weren’t, that’s why you adopted me, because you were miserable, because it was Mister Gold’s curse, not yours. It wasn’t what you wanted. He made you think you wanted it.”

“Henry, stop,” Regina breathed and after a few seconds added, “could you go and get me some more water, please?”

“Sure,” Henry said and Emma heard him stand up and go into the bathroom to get some water. She could hear Regina’s breathing

become fast and heavy and could tell that she was attempting to calm herself down.

When Henry returned Regina accepted the water and quickly changed the subject to talk about the comic book that Henry had been reading earlier. Emma wasn't sure if Henry knew that Regina was attempting to change the subject but he happily started to discuss Wolverine's latest adventures.

While the two discussed the comic versus the films Emma began to think about what Henry had said and Regina's reaction to it. Had her ten year old son and his childlike innocence managed to hit the nail on the head and accurately explain what had happened? Had Regina gone from being controlled by one person to another and then another, constantly looking for happiness and acceptance but just being used each time?

Emma never thought she would feel sorry for Regina Mills of all people but now she started to really think about what she had learnt she was understanding the woman and her actions much better. Regina's determination to control the situation, her fierce grip on Henry and her cold attitude all suddenly made complete sense to Emma. And most of all she realised she had a lot more in common with the former Queen that she ever imagined.

Chapter 20

It was around midnight when Emma realised she was being watched. She put down her magazine and looked up to see Regina regarding her with a curious expression. Emma looked over to where Henry slept on the other bed to check he was asleep before she quietly asked Regina, “everything okay?”

“You heard all of it didn’t you?” Regina questioned softly.

“Most of it, yes,” Emma didn’t see any reason to lie.

“You’ve been different,” Regina said with a knowing look.

“How so?” Emma raised an eyebrow.

“You’ve been looking at me with pity ever since you woke up this evening,” Regina said with a sigh and looked away from the blonde.

Emma shook her head as she picked up and continued to examine her magazine with interest, “I haven’t looked at you with pity, I don’t pity you. Well, I do, I pity you that you don’t recognise empathy and understanding and that you mistake it for pity. I pity you that you automatically see everything as negative. But having heard what you told Henry,” she looked up to see Regina looking back at her with confusion, “I’m not surprised.”

“You understand me?” Regina chuckled and looked away.

“I can commiserate with you when it comes to having a shitty home life and growing up the way you did,” Emma said quietly, “I can understand the feeling of never feeling good enough for those around you, people expecting you to do or act in a certain way. Being punished when you don’t do as they say.”

Regina looked at Emma and their eyes met and a flash of understanding passed between them.

“I’m.. responsible,” Regina swallowed hard, “I’m responsible for.. whatever happened to you as a child. You should hate me, just like everyone else.”

“No,” Emma shook her head, “Henry’s right, you were manipulated every step of the way, you may have cast the curse but only because you were so full of hate and a need for revenge that you probably couldn’t even see straight by that time. My parents chose to stick me in a tree and send me here. But you know what, Regina? When I was sixteen I left the foster system and I ran away from everything it stood for. I lived my own life. I did what I wanted to do and there was no one to tell me differently, no one to punish me if I didn’t obey by the rules. Hell, I broke a lot of rules, which is why I had Henry in prison. So, yeah, my life was shit. But at sixteen I was able to make my own choices. At sixteen you were still being controlled by your mother, at nineteen you were married off like some prize doll. I’m twenty eight now, I’ve had twelve good years where I have been free, living my life and being happy. When you were twenty eight you’d spent your whole life being manipulated and imprisoned by people who claimed to love you.”

Henry turned over in his sleep and both women looked at him in silence for a moment to see if he would awaken. When it was clear he wouldn’t Emma spoke again, “so, yeah, you may think you see pity in my eyes when I look at you but it’s not. Its compassion, understanding and empathy. And yeah, I am like my mother, I can forgive a hell of a lot. And yes, my car is as cute as a fucking button.”

Regina laughed despite herself, “I have no idea what you’re talking about,” she smiled knowingly.

“Your mother sounds like a piece of work, Regina,” Emma said seriously, “and I honestly have no idea how you managed to raise Henry as well as you did. When I gave him away it was so he would have his best chance and, Evil Queen or not, he got that with you. He

didn't have to live the life I lived when I was given up for my best chance."

"I love him, with everything I have," Regina said sincerely, "but I know he'll be taken away from me again. Once this blows over he'll go back to the way he was, he'll want to be with you again."

"No," Emma shook her head, "kids may be fickle but you opening up to Henry has probably helped him to understand you. Before you were a bit of a mystery to him, strict and mysterious."

"I don't love very well," Regina divulged.

"I think you love too well," Emma said, "it's about knowing when to let go."

"But I don't want to let go," Regina admitted seriously.

Emma had always thought that Regina was the least like the fairy tale characters in Storybrooke, she could easily see Mary Margaret being Snow White, Ruby being Little Red Riding Hood, all of the dwarves were almost clichés but Regina was strong, intelligent, calculated and adaptable. But Emma still had to remind herself on occasion that Regina wasn't born in the world Emma had grown up in, she hadn't been immersed in the same ideologies, in some ways she was very old fashioned.

"Sometimes you have to let something go in order for it to want to be with you," Emma explained, "like horses, I know next to nothing about horses but I do know that you need to earn their respect, right?"

Regina nodded silently.

"Children are like that. If you keep a child at home, tell them that you love them but you won't let them out because you want to keep them safe and look after them that child will rebel. Just like Henry did. Henry didn't just rebel because of the curse, he didn't rebel because he didn't love you. He rebelled because he needs his freedom. You can

show him you love him and still let him live his own life,” Emma rationalised, “the more freedom you give him the more he will respect you and love you for it.”

“But what if he doesn’t want to come back to me?” Regina whispered.

“He will, I may have given birth to him but you’re his Mom, like earlier today he came running to you. No one else would have done at that moment, he needed you,” Emma smiled.

“And that doesn’t bother you?” Regina looked confused.

“No, because I know Henry has a lot of love to give, I know he loves me and I know he loves you. Its not a competition, its life,” Emma shrugged, “I also know he will be devastated if anything happens to you.”

Regina stiffened a little as she correctly predicted which direction the conversation was about to go, “Miss Swan.. Emma,” she corrected herself and Emma gave her a small smile, “please, trust me when I say that it is better for everyone if I don’t say who did this to me.”

“What if they come after Henry?” Emma attempted.

“They won’t,” Regina said, “they are doing this for Henry.”

Emma frowned at this new information and opened her mouth to speak again but Regina held up her hand to stop her, “please, just let it go. I can’t imagine they will try again, time is a great healer. Now, please, don’t quiz me any further on this, especially not now.”

With a sigh Emma nodded her agreement, she didn’t want to let it go but Regina had said please, twice no less, and Emma didn’t want to press her any further when she was still clearly concerned about the medication swimming around her system.

“Okay, but I’m beginning to think that the only reason you’re not telling me is because if you do I’ll go and arrest them and deprive you

of my wonderful company,” Emma picked up her magazine and held it up high so Regina couldn’t see her snigger.

“That too,” Regina sighed as she closed her eyes to attempt to get some more sleep.

Chapter 21

Jefferson walked through the corridors of Storybrooke hospital with nervous agitation, Regina had been right about one thing, he hadn't got it in him. He couldn't kill her, he was too scared to even try. Even though she had abandoned him in Wonderland and then pulled him into the curse of Storybrooke without his daughter. He still couldn't kill or even maim her and that made him feel weak and angry at himself.

He had rushed towards Grace when the curse broke, a magical white light spreading through the town signalling that, at last, his daughter would remember who he was. As he arrived at the house where she now lived she ran to greet him and allowed him to lift her in an embrace and swing her around happily.

But Grace was a child with all the emotions and confusions that come with being a child. She didn't want to go with him, she had new parents now, people she loved. Or thought she loved. She couldn't understand it herself so she certainly couldn't explain it to him. She was still stuck between two lives, she knew her father but she didn't want to let go of the family she had been cursed to live happily in for the last twenty eight years.

Jefferson had gone to see Regina but he had been too afraid of her and changed his mind at last moment. He knew all she would do is taunt him for being weak and that was the last thing he wanted to hear right then. He wanted to hurt Regina, he had previously hoped that releasing Belle and sending her to Gold would enrage the pawnbroker so much that he would kill Regina. For some reason that hadn't happened, the Queen continued to live and Jefferson wanted nothing more than to make her suffer.

Luckily the town was still running wild with confusion and most of the hospital was abandoned so it was easy for him to get to the secret facility and walk along the corridor he remembered so well from when he had released Belle. Coming to the door he wanted he opened up the small viewing plate with a smile, “mirror, mirror on the wall,” he drawled, “who wants to help punish the Queen?”

Sidney Glass scrambled from his bed and approached the door and bent down so he could make eye contact with Jefferson, “I do,” he whispered cruelly.

“Then, you and I need to go on a little adventure,” Jefferson said as he used the key he stole from the reception desk to unlock the door.

Chapter 22

“What’s this?” Mary Margaret asked Regina as she slammed a large cylindrical leather container down on the end of the bed, shocking the older woman awake.

“Where did you get that?” Regina asked as she began to understand what was happening.

Emma was still waking up from Mary Margaret’s recent speedy entry to the hospital room and looked equally confused, “what’s that?”

“That’s what I’m trying to find out,” Mary Margaret told Emma without breaking eye contact with Regina.

“It’s.. a hat box,” Regina whispered softly as she shook her head to try to awaken fully.

“Jefferson and Sidney Glass were seen breaking into the Mayor’s office late last night, when we went to investigate neither of them were in there but this was found in your office,” Mary Margaret said with a cold tone, “now, I would guess that this is bad news, so if you want our help you need to start being open and honest with us. Now.”

Regina looked worriedly from Emma to Mary Margaret before she gave a slow nod, “Jefferson is a portal jumper, you probably remember him as the Hatter from the Alice in Wonderland stories that your cursed identity read as a child.”

Mary Margaret frowned as she examined the hat box in her hand, “so you had the hat? Here in this world?”

Regina nodded, “but it seems Jefferson now has it.”

“So, he can use this hat to what? Go back to the Enchanted Forest?” Mary Margaret asked.

“Theoretically, yes,” Regina said as she struggled to sit up a little straighter, her eyes glancing to check Henry was still asleep and filling with relief when she noted that he was, “he could have gone to a number of places.”

“Can you think why? His daughter is still here, why would he leave? And why would he take Sidney with him?” Mary Margaret quizzed.

Regina seemed to be straining to think under Mary Margaret’s onslaught of questions and Emma stood up and held up a hand to Mary Margaret, “give her a second, the pain medication is.. slowing her down a bit.”

Mary Margaret nodded her understanding but still looked slightly impatient, she knew no good would come of this and knew that the sooner they understood what Jefferson was up to the sooner they could mount a defence and do something about it.

“He doesn’t need Sidney..” Regina drifted off in thought.

“Then why take him with him?” Mary Margaret asked with confusion.

“It could have been anyone, Sidney would have just been the easiest to convince,” Regina nodded as she began to understand parts of Jefferson’s plan.

“Convince to do what?” Emma tried softly.

“Portal jumping, through the hat,” Regina explained, “one goes over, one comes back. Two go over, two come back.”

“I don’t get it,” Emma frowned, “what’s Jefferson doing?”

“He’s bringing someone back,” Regina said with concern, “he is travelling with Sidney so he can bring someone else back. He is bringing someone to Storybrooke.”

“Who?” Mary Margaret demanded.

“I have no idea,” Regina admitted, “he didn’t get the moniker the Mad Hatter without good reason.”

“Is there anything we can do to stop him?” Mary Margaret asked.

“Not without magic,” Regina shook her head.

“And.. your magic?” Mary Margaret almost seemed afraid to ask.

“I have yet to feel my magic here,” Regina said in a low voice, clearly distressed at telling her former enemy of her weakness.

“Gold seems to have magic, some anyway,” Mary Margaret told the older brunette.

Regina nodded, “he brought magic to Storybrooke, he probably has a plan for it. He has a plan for most things.”

“What should we do?” Emma asked Regina.

“Prepare another place,” Regina said as she slid back down into her bed, “someone’s coming for dinner,” she mumbled sleepily.

Chapter 23

The next day passed relatively peacefully, there were no signs of Jefferson or Sidney and the after-curse panic in the town seemed to be dying down following David and Mary Margaret's meeting. Emma noticed that staff numbers in the hospital were beginning to get back to normal, Clara came to see Regina a couple of times and conversationally spoke of the general consensus to get back to normal life while they looked for other ways home.

Regina had been unusually quiet and had attempted to sleep or at least rest the whole day, she had declined to take part in Henry's questioning and even the word games they had played freely the day before. Her expression was sombre and the tightness around her eyes had increased, when Clara had suggested an increase in pain medication Regina had refused it.

Once evening had again arrived and Henry had fallen into a deep sleep Regina sat up in bed and looked at Emma, "I need your help."

"What with?" Emma regarded her suspiciously.

"Magic," Regina replied.

Emma sorted a laugh, "sure, let me get some fairy dust and my magic wand.."

"Now is not the time to be flippant, Miss Swan," Regina sighed.

"How the hell am I going to help you with magic?" Emma stood and walked over to Regina's bed and stood beside her with her arms folded, "why would I even help you with magic?"

"Because, Jefferson will soon be back with my mother," Regina declared.

“Your.. your mother?” Emma stuttered, “but she’s in a mirror somewhere.”

“She’s in Wonderland,” Regina replied with exasperation at Emma’s lack of understanding, “when I.. when.. well, suffice to say that the mirror sent her to Wonderland.”

“Oh my God,” Emma whispered, “you said she became a Queen there.. is.. is she?”

“Off with their heads?” Regina asked before confirming with a slow nod.

“And.. she has magic?” Emma asked.

“Yes and I don’t,” Regina said, “hence I need your help before she gets here.”

“Why would she come here? What does she want?” Emma quizzed.

“The last time we spoke was on bad terms,” Regina admitted.

“What did you do?” Emma sighed as she sat on the edge of the bed.

“I sent a pirate to kill her,” Regina explained.

“Well, that would sour a relationship,” Emma agreed.

“He didn’t manage it, she killed him,” Regina continued, “she has a score to settle with me.”

“And why would I help you?” Emma queried.

“Because she will tear this town apart,” Regina explained firmly, “and if she finds out about Henry,” she glanced over to the sleeping boy, “I dread to think what she will do.”

Emma seemed to be taking the information in, she’d heard a little about Regina’s mother and none of it was good. The prospect of her

coming to Storybrooke was not a positive one but then the prospect of helping the Evil Queen get her magic back was not much better.

“..I believe I am sufficiently rested..” Emma realised Regina had been talking and her head snapped up at that comment.

“Sufficiently rested?” Emma looked incredulous, “You nearly bled to death a couple of days ago! A bit of sleep today doesn’t make you ready to.. whatever you’re planning to do.”

“I don’t have the luxury of time, Miss Swan, my son is in danger,” Regina replied.

“Our son,” Emma corrected, “so what do we need to do to get your magic back?”

“I need a spell book, my mother’s actually,” Regina said, “Mister Gold will have it.”

“And he’ll give it to me?” Emma asked in disbelief.

“You have to try,” Regina shuffled herself a little higher in the bed and winced at the tightness of her still-healing wounds.

“I really don’t think this is a good idea,” Emma said, “you don’t look well enough to be.. gearing up with magic to fight your mother.”

Regina huffed and attempted to push the blankets down from her body to get up, “I will be fine, I can..”

“Whoa, what are you doing?” Emma hissed as Regina brought her knees up and attempted to spin and leave the bed.

“Getting out of this infernal bed,” Regina said through teeth clenched in pain.

“You’ll rip your stitches,” Emma said in warning as Regina pushed the blonde to one side and lowered her feet to the cold hospital floor. As she pushed herself up from the bed her hand went straight to her

stomach wounds and she winced in pain and began to double over as a low moan escaped her lips.

“You’re not ready, Regina,” Emma instructed as she held the old woman up from falling on the floor with a hand on each upper arm.

“Let go of me,” Regina whispered through the pain.

“No,” Emma’s eyes flashed in determination, “I saved your damn life and I’m not about to watch you put yourself back on the operating table!”

As Emma manoeuvred Regina back towards the bed a flash of white light left Emma’s hands and was instantly absorbed by Regina’s arms. They both gasped, Emma at the surprise of what the hell had just happened and Regina at the sudden display of magic that was triggering her own dormant magic.

Regina sat on the edge of the bed limply as Emma looked at the palms of her hands, “what was that?”

“Magic, you have magic,” Regina whispered as she looked at her own palms.

“How the hell do I have magic?” Emma asked in a shocked whisper.

“You’re the product of True Love,” Regina replied, “good looks, charm and magic.. its a bundled deal.”

Emma just stared at her palms, all traces of magic had now vanished from them so she wondered if she had been dreaming but then she looked at Regina and took a step back in shock. A purple glow had filled Regina’s eyes and the older woman had tilted her head towards the ceiling and her taut body was almost shaking.

“R-regina?” Emma stuttered as she looked on helplessly.

Suddenly the purple glow seemed to vanish and whatever had been holding Regina rigid released its grip and the brunette slumped

forward and began to slide to the floor. Emma quickly stepped forward and easily caught her, “Regina..” Emma whispered as she gently shook the unconscious woman. ””

Chapter 24

“Regina..” Emma shook the older woman as she gently lifted her back onto the bed, mindful of her stomach wounds.

Just as Emma was really beginning to worry the brunette suddenly gasped and her eyes flew open and Emma was pleased to note that the eerie purple glow had vanished. With a wince but an enigmatic smile Regina sat up again and Emma held her hands out just in case the older woman started to topple over again.

Regina held up her hand and the magazine that Emma had been reading whizzed through the air and into Regina’s waiting hand.

“What the hell!” Emma exclaimed as she took a few steps back. Of course she knew Regina was the Evil Queen and supposedly had magic but to see it so obviously was a complete shock to her system.

Regina held the magazine in her hand and looked at it with a grin, “acceptable,” she said to herself.

“Erm, hi,” Emma said with annoyance, “want to clue me in on what the hell just happened?”

“As I said, Miss Swan, you have magic,” Regina said as she put the magazine on the bed beside her and looked at Emma calmly, “somehow you have either transferred some of your magic to me or you have kick-started my own magic. Either way I have some access to my powers.”

“Some!?” Emma exclaimed as she pointed at the magazine, “that.. it.. it just flew..”

Regina’s expression changed a serious one, “that’s all very well if my mother desires some reading material but I need to practice and get

stronger before she arrives, my mother is not going to be impressed by a floating article on,” she glanced down at the front cover of the magazine, “impressing that..” she paused, “.. girl?”

Emma reached over and snatched the magazine up quickly and folded it into a tube and held it with both hands as she refused to meet Regina’s eye, “so, what now?”

“I need to practice my magic, and you need to get Henry out of Storybrooke,” Regina said as she held her hand over her aching stomach.

“I’m not leaving,” Emma declared.

“Miss Sw..” Regina began to argue.

“No, I’m not leaving and neither is Henry,” Emma stood firmly, “if your mother really is as bad as you say then you need us with you. And if I have magic then maybe I can help you?”

“Magic takes a long time to master,” Regina sniffed, “I doubt you would be able to tap into yours for a while yet.”

“Then I’ll help you in other ways, I slayed a dragon, remember?” Emma nodded.

“Yes and then you gave Gold exactly what he needed to bring magic to Storybrooke and thus enabled Jefferson to use the hat to bring my mother here, didn’t that turn out so well?” Regina sneered.

Emma frowned, “Gold made us go through all that for nothing, didn’t he?”

“Yes,” Regina bristled at the memory.

“All I needed to do was kiss Henry to wake him, getting that egg from the dragon was..” she looked up at Regina, “was just him using my emotions to manipulate me to make me do his dirty work.”

Regina smiled as she looked down at her feet as she slowly circled her ankles, “sounds familiar.”

“All of this,” Emma waved the rolled up magazine in the air, “is Gold’s fault.”

“Everything always is,” Regina said without looking up.

“What’s going on?” Henry asked sleepily and Regina turned around with an apologetic expression.

“Sorry, Henry, were we being too loud?” Regina said in a soft tone.

Henry nodded tiredly as he rubbed his eye with the back of his hand.

“Just go back to sleep,” Regina said and stared at Henry significantly and a few seconds later his eyes flickered closed and he slumped back onto the bed.

“What did you do?!” Emma hissed worriedly as she threw her magazine onto a chair and started to approach Henry but paused halfway and looked at Regina demanding an answer.

“Suggested he went back to sleep,” Regina shrugged.

“Did you use magic?” Emma asked.

“I said I had to practice,” Regina explained.

“On our son?!” Emma cried.

“He is unharmed, he won’t remember anything,” Regina frowned, “I would never hurt him.”

Emma could hear the hurt tone in Regina’s voice and nodded, “I.. I know you wouldn’t, I’m sorry, it’s just.. weird to see that.”

Regina nodded, “I understand, you’re not used to magic, I’m sorry.”

Regina began to lift herself from the bed to standing up and missed Emma's shocked expression in reply to the apology she had been offered. Upon seeing Regina standing by the bed Emma approached her again with her arms out ready to steady Regina if she needed it.

Regina held onto her stomach gently with both hands and closed her eyes and looked deep in thought. Emma stood there uselessly watching the brunette while having absolutely no idea what was happening or what she should be doing to help, if anything. Regina's eyes fluttered open and she let out a breath that she'd been holding and nodded to herself.

"What was that?" Emma asked.

"A healing spell," Regina answered, "I'm unable to completely heal myself but I can close the wounds and lessen the pain without the need for this," she pointed to the pain medication machine.

Emma was about to ask another question when Regina waved her hand and the tubes and wires from the machine vanished from her body and her hospital gown changed to a simple red dress and heels.

Regina limbered up her shoulders and tilted her neck from side to side to release some of the pressure from laying still in a hospital bed for so long, "much better," she said as she took a deep, cleansing breath.

She took a step forward and appeared to falter for a second and winced as a hand absently rose to her waist again, Emma immediately stepped forward, "Regina, maybe you should rest a while longer."

"The injuries were more severe than I have had to deal with before," Regina admitted, "once my magic is stronger I will be able to heal myself more thoroughly."

"What injuries, my dear?" a third female voice asked from the doorway and Emma saw Regina's face fall in cold fear.

Chapter 25

“Mother,” Regina said breathlessly as she turned to face the newcomer.

“Regina,” Cora said by way of greeting as she regarded the room with confusion, “what is this dire place?”

“Mother, what are you doing here?” Regina asked and Emma wisely decided to remain as still as stone and allowed Regina to deal with the situation. She noted the tone of Regina’s voice had dropped to that of an apprehensive child and could see a slight shake in Regina’s hand that she still had pressed to her stomach.

“My darling girl,” Regina smiled but Emma considered that she had seen that particular smile in one too many horror movies to find it calming, “I have been looking for a way back to you for some time. When I heard of your curse I threw up a protection spell around a small corner of the Enchanted Forest and waited for a way to see you again.”

“You were in the Enchanted Forest?” Regina asked quietly.

“What are your injuries?” Cora repeated as her eyes fixed on where Regina still held her stomach.

“Oh,” Regina looked down, “it is nothing, Mother, really.”

In a flash Cora had waved her hand towards Regina and Regina’s arms were pulled magically down to her sides, raising her other hand Cora rippled her fingers in the air and Emma watched in confusion as the middle of Regina’s red dress appeared see-through. Taut olive skin covered in bandages came into view, the rest of Regina’s dress remained firmly in place and Emma couldn’t help but stare as the bandages unravelled and clumps of cotton with traces of blood fell to the floor.

The stab wounds were obvious and raw and Cora gasped, “you’ve been speared,” she whispered.

Emma breathed a sigh of relief that Cora seemed to be concerned for her daughter’s wellbeing.

“Who did this to you?” Cora demanded.

“Mother..” Regina whispered in fear, her arms still not under her own control and pushing her stand ramrod straight in front of her mother’s intense gaze.

“It was my understanding that you controlled this realm, Regina,” Cora said with distaste, “are you such a weak leader that you are unable to control the peasants beneath you?”

Emma’s eyes widened and her jaw dropped as she realised that Cora couldn’t care less about Regina’s injuries and was far more concerned with the fact that Regina had allowed this to happen to her.

“Hey,” Emma started but found herself immediately silenced and held in place by a flick of Cora’s wrist.

“Even your personal guard has become insolent and disrespectful,” Cora said with a sigh as she waved her hand again and Regina dress reappeared intact and Regina’s stance slackened slightly.

“Mother, please,” Regina started.

“Who did this to you?” Cora demanded loudly and Emma was relieved that Regina had put Henry into some kind of deep sleep so he wasn’t awoken by the nightmare that was unravelling in front of them.

“I can’t say,” Regina said weakly.

If Emma hadn’t been frozen solid her mouth would have gaped open in shock again, she couldn’t believe that Regina was even protecting her attacker from her mother.

“You can and you will,” Cora said darkly as a black mist curled slowly through the air from the tips of Cora’s fingers towards Regina’s face. Regina took a step back but it was too late, the mist entered her body through her nose and she seemed to slump slightly as if her body was no longer under her control.

“There,” Cora said with satisfaction, “a truth spell, it’s been a while since I had to use this on you, isn’t it, dear?”

“Yes, Mother,” Regina slurred in a daze of some form.

“Who impaled you, Regina?” Cora asked again with an arrogant smile.

“A boy,” Regina replied, “I don’t know his name.”

“A boy?” Cora spat angrily, “you allowed a boy to do this to you? Who is he? What do you know about him?”

“He is an older boy from the school,” Regina said in a daze, “he protected Henry from a fight once.”

“Henry?” Cora frowned but then shook her head, “why are you protecting this boy?”

“He’s a child,” Regina acknowledged, “he deserves a second chance.”

It fell into place for Emma, the older boy had clearly been a friend of Henry’s. Henry had probably confided in him before the curse that he suspected that his Mom was the Evil Queen, probably complained of how she treated him just like he had done to Emma. When the curse broke the boy wanted to protect Henry from the Evil Queen. But Regina had refused to name him because he was a child and she didn’t want him to get in trouble for his actions. Emma’s heart clenched that this so-called Evil Queen would protect her assassin simply because he was a child.

Clearly Cora felt quite differently, “you fool! Showing the Kingdom that kind of weakness will only lead to further attempts on your life.

You must make an example of the boy.”

“No, Mother, please.. don’t,” Regina started to panic as she knew what was coming next.

“Summon him here, Regina,” Cora demanded, “bring him here.”

Whatever control Cora had over Regina forced Regina to swish her hand in the air and suddenly a purple mist appeared in the between them all and a boy of maybe fifteen emerged. He looked around in confusion but upon seeing Regina he attempted to run towards the door, Cora held up her hand and froze him in place too.

“Kill him, Regina,” Cora instructed.

Regina’s face contorted as she attempted to fight the control Cora had over her, “no, Mother, no, I won’t,” she breathed.

“How did you get to be so weak?” Cora shook her head, “I can see that you have forgotten all my lessons during your time in this new world, you have become ineffectual as a leader, weak and cowardly. And the Kingdom will recognise that.”

“Mother, please, I’ll be good,” escaped from Regina’s lips as if it were a frequently repeated mantra and Emma’s heart broke into a thousand pieces inside her immobile body.

“My dear,” Cora smiled as she approached Regina and gently rubbed her cheek with the back of her hand, “don’t worry, mother is here to fix your problems. I will take control of the Kingdom and regain power. First we need to kill the boy, make an example of him..”

“Mother..” Regina’s words were cut off by a violent slap to the face from her mother.

“Do not speak back to me, child!” Cora shouted before her face twisted into a smile, “I’m going to go and explore this Kingdom, I will be back later, I suggest you fix your attitude before then.”

Cora took a step forward and grabbed the boy and in a black mist the two were gone and both Emma and Regina were released from Cora's spell.

Chapter 26

Emma stumbled forward from the pressure she had been using in an attempt to get out of Cora's invisible grip. She momentarily looked confused, the sudden abundance of magic around her was disorientating, people were appearing and disappearing before her eyes and she had to remind herself that this was her world now. Magic existed. All bets were off.

She looked at Regina who was just standing and staring at the floor in some kind of shock.

"It was Max," Emma whispered.

"What?" Regina mumbled as she continued to stare at the floor.

"Max Cornwall," Emma explained, "he attacked you.."

"Oh," Regina said distractedly, "is that his name?"

"Regina?" Emma whispered, "are you okay?"

Regina's head snapped up, "you have to get Henry and leave Storybrooke at once," she decided.

Emma shook her head, "no, no way am I leaving you here with that monster."

"But.." Regina started but Emma took a step towards her and gently grabbed her by her upper arms and looked into her eyes determinedly, "Regina," Emma said carefully, "I will not leave you alone with that woman."

It was clear that Regina was fighting a raging battle internally, one side of her wanted to get Henry to safety but the other side of her was

terrified of her mother and what she was capable of. Emma could see it in the brunette's eyes and her facial expression as she looked at Emma and swallowed hard as she slowly nodded her head. It was then that Emma began to really understand how petrified Regina was when it came to her mother and how much abuse she must have been subjected to as a child.

"So, what do we do?" Emma asked as she released her grip on Regina's arms and brushed a nervous hand through her blonde locks.

"I have no idea," Regina replied.

"We should warn the others," Emma offered.

"Oh, they'll know by now," Regina shook her head with a small laugh, "my mother likes to make an entrance, she'll be doing that now."

"Does she have any weaknesses? Something we can use against her?" Emma tried.

"No," Regina sighed, "she's powerful, she may even be more powerful now than she was when I last saw her."

"Last time you got rid of her by pushing her through a mirror into another realm.." Emma remembered.

"She won't be falling for that again," Regina pointed out.

"No," Emma agreed, "will Gold help us?"

Regina smirked, "yes, he'll want her gone just as much as I do."

"How come?" Emma frowned.

"Because she'll find a way to ruin whatever he has planned, remember, he created this curse for his own reasons. If my mother interferes then he loses everything and he doesn't like to lose," Regina said as she looked over at Henry's sleeping form, "we have to get Henry to safety."

My mother believes that love is weakness and if she find out about Henry then..”

“Yeah,” Emma interrupted, not wanting Regina to finish that sentence, “is there anywhere he’ll be safe?”

“The convent,” Regina nodded, “my mother avoids the fairies and they avoid her. They’ll be the first to barricade their door when news of her arrival hits them. You have to take him there now, Emma.”

Regina approached Henry and placed a hand on his shoulder a glow of purple light transferred between them and Henry opened his eyes, “Mom?”

“Henry, we don’t have time to explain but you have to go with Emma,” Regina said as she gently helped him into a sitting position and handed him his shoes.

“What’s going on? How come you’re dressed? How long was I asleep?” Henry quizzed as he pulled on his shoes while Regina packed his backpack for him.

“Regina’s mother is here,” Emma announced, ignoring Regina’s glare, “we need to get you to the convent so you’re safe.”

“No, I wanna stay here, with you guys,” Henry said, terror filling his eyes at the prospect of Cora being nearby.

“Henry, it’s not safe,” Regina explained softly, “my mother doesn’t know about you, the longer we can keep it that way, the better.”

“But I want to..” Henry started.

“Kid,” Emma interrupted, “we need to know you’re safe so we can deal with Cora..”

Henry looked at Emma and smiled, “you’re staying with her?”

“Of course,” Emma nodded, “I’m taking you to the convent and then I’m going to stay with Regina until this is over.”

Henry nodded as he took his scarf from Regina’s waiting hands and wrapped it around his neck, “thank you for telling me the truth,” he said to Emma quietly.

Regina looked away and Henry quickly grabbed her arm, “I know you’re trying to protect me, Mom, but I’m not a kid anymore and I deserve to know what’s going on.”

Regina looked at him and looked like she was about to argue when Emma spoke up, “we know, Henry, it’s just hard for your Mom because she remembers changing your diaper.”

“Eww, Emma!” Henry complained as he slid off of the bed and bent down to do his laces up on his shoes.

Emma looked at Regina who gratefully smiled at the blonde.

“Are you going to stay here?” Emma asked Regina.

“No, I’m going to the library,” Regina said.

“The library?” Emma quizzed.

“It’s the place I’m least likely to bump into mother, she’ll go to my office and the house but I think the library should buy me some time. I can use the time to research and build up some strength,” Regina admitted.

Henry stood up and looked at Regina with pride, “are you going to fight her, Mom?”

“I.. I’m going to try,” Regina nodded.

Henry gently put his arms around Regina’s waist and hugged her, mindful of her injuries, “be careful, Mom, make sure you have Emma with you. Because she’s the Saviour.”

Regina held Henry close to her body and looked over his head to Emma, “so she is,” she smiled at the blonde.

Chapter 27

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

An hour later Emma had safely dropped Henry off at the convent. It had been hard to convince him to stay with the fairies rather than try to help but Emma had eventually gotten through to him but explaining to him just how ruthless Cora was.

Despite Regina's description on her childhood with Cora, Emma knew that she had left a lot of the details out in a bid to protect Henry. Emma had so such qualms about telling Henry what she suspected went on and exactly how twisted she supposed Cora could be. Emma may not have been in the running for parent of the year but she had learnt that, where Henry was concerned, honesty was the best policy.

Henry seemed to understand that things were serious and begrudgingly agreed to stay out of the way and wait to hear from someone, Nova had taken him in and swore to protect him should Cora turn up. Emma didn't fancy Nova's chances if that did happen and knew that Henry's, and in fact everybody's, best chance lay with neutralising the threat of Cora as quickly as possible.

Emma parked the Bug out of the way down a side street from the main road and walked towards the library. As she turned onto main street she noticed that there was not a single other person in sight, she presumed that everyone was in hiding. Two burning cars were the only sign that anything untoward had happened and Emma quickly walked up the street keeping herself close to the shop fronts to try to remain undetected.

She approached the library and attempted to open the door but it was locked, she banged her fist on the door as she looked up and down the street in the hope that no one would see her. An unidentifiable pair of

eyes looked at her and then she heard the door unlocked and was promptly pulled inside.

“Ruby?” Emma frowned.

Ruby quickly closed the door behind Emma and continued peeking out the window, in between papers that had been stuck to the glass, “everyone is through there,” Ruby replied pointing into the main library room.

Emma walked into the library and was pleased to see some form of a truce had clearly been established as Mister Gold, Mary Margaret, David, Regina, Granny and Belle were all stood around discussing the issue.

It was Regina who looked up first and asked, “Henry?”

“Is fine,” Emma replied with an assuring grin, “he’s safe. What the hell happened outside?”

“Cora appeared in the middle of main street and started throwing fireballs,” David said grimly.

“She had a boy from the school with her,” Mary Margaret said and Emma glanced at Regina and could instantly tell that Regina hadn’t elaborated on why that was, “I think it was Max, I don’t know what she wanted with him.”

“Was he okay?” Emma asked.

“He seemed to be unhurt but she was using magic to restrain him,” Mary Margaret explained.

“She announced a curfew,” Granny explained with a shake of the head, “told us all that if we were seen out of our homes she would kill us on the spot!”

“Her magic is impressive,” Gold added, “but she’s not unbeatable.”

Regina looked at Gold with an incredulous expression, “she has mastered magic in this world to much more of an extent than you or I, what do you propose we do?”

“She only needs to slip once, Dearie,” Gold grinned.

“Enough with the riddles, what’s the plan?” Emma sighed.

“The same plan as before, we banish her to another realm,” Gold shrugged as if it were obvious.

“I highly doubt that pushing her through a large mirror is going to work again,” Regina folded her arms and glared at him.

“There are other ways to create a portal,” Gold reminded her.

Regina thought for a moment, “the hat?”

“If Jefferson brought her back then the hat is here in Storybrooke,” Gold nodded.

“I’m sorry, what hat?” Belle asked in confusion.

“Jefferson is in possession of a hat that allows him to travel between realms,” Gold explained to her kindly, “it’s how Cora is here in the first place.”

“What does she want?” Mary Margaret asked, her eyes fixed on Regina as if she somehow already knew.

“Power,” Gold interrupted before Regina could speak, “the only thing Cora has ever been interested in is power.”

“We’ll need time to find the hat,” David said, “how do we keep her distracted while we find Jefferson?”

“Me,” Regina whispered.

“Regina..” Emma said in a quiet warning.

“She’s my mother,” Regina argued, “I can keep her occupied, keep her away from the rest of the town. While you,” she gestured to the group, “find the hat.”

“I’m coming with you,” Emma announced.

“No, it’s too dangerous,” Regina told her.

“She already thinks I’m your personal guard or something,” Emma argued, “it makes sense for me to be there.”

Regina was about to argue again when Gold spoke up, “so that’s that settled then, the Queen and the Saviour will distract Cora while the rest of us find the hat.”

“And how do we get rid of her?” Granny asked with a confused expression.

“Get Cora to call a town meeting,” Mary Margaret suggested, “we’ll all be there and we can bring the hat, with another people there it will be a distraction for her.”

“You’ll need someone with magic to open a portal,” Regina said.

“She won’t want me within a one hundred feet of her,” Gold acknowledged, “so I’m afraid I won’t be able to help.”

“So that leaves us with Jefferson, or Regina,” David guessed, looking at the brunette.

“Jefferson brought her here,” Belle commented, “unless he has had second thoughts he won’t want to help us.”

All eyes fell on Regina who brought her hand up to her head and slowly nodded, “I will open a portal, as long as I can get to the hat and far enough away from her to cast the spell.”

“And then all that remains is for one of you,” Gold indicated the rest of them with the tip of his cane, “to toss her in.”

Chapter 28

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

With a wave of her hand Regina transported herself and Emma to the hallway of 108 Mifflin Street. She took a breath and glanced sideways at the front door and seemed relieved that the previous scene had been cleared up. Emma noticed her surprise but remained silent on the matter.

“It’s imperative,” Regina said as she looked around the room for an indication as to what had happened there, “that you do not antagonise my mother.”

“Got it,” Emma said with a firm nod.

“I’m serious,” Regina stood in front of Emma and captured her eyes with her own, “my mother will not stand for any backchat, she will kill you without a moment’s thought. No matter what happens to me you are to remain silent, understood?”

“I..” Emma started to argue.

“No, Emma, I’m serious,” Regina asserted, “you wanted to be here, I wanted you to leave town. But if you are going to remain then you have to do so by my rules. I know my mother, you don’t. A misplaced word from you will make this so much worse than it already is.”

Emma could sense Regina’s rising panic and nodded, “I understand, I’ll be quiet.”

Regina sighed in relief, “thank you,” she walked towards the living room and slowly paced in front of the fireplace, “while I’m obviously

not looking forward to speaking with her again I'm.. glad that you will be here."

Emma looked at Regina with a soft smile, she had never expected the strong brunette to admit anything of the sort, "I wish I could do more than just stand here silently."

"Knowing that you are there will be enough," Regina said before taking a few steps towards Emma and planting herself in front of the blonde, "how do I look?"

"Err," Emma stuttered with no clue how to answer such a question, "good, well, great, you look great."

Regina rolled her eyes and turned towards the mirror in the living room and began to analyse her reflection and smoothed her hair unnecessarily and picked invisible dust from her red dress, "mother will be very angry if I'm not presentable."

The tone of the ex-Mayor changed to that of a smaller and insecure woman, somehow younger. Emma took a deep breath to steel herself against whatever onslaught was coming from Cora.

"Okay, it's time," Regina said as she looked at the clock on the wall, "let's hope those idiots manage to find the hat within the next sixty minutes. I don't think I'll be able to distract mother for much longer than that."

"Regina," Emma called to the brunette, "your mother is wrong, about so many things, just remember that I'm here and I've got your back. Silently."

Regina nodded and gave Emma a tight smile, "just remember you're my personal guard, seen and not heard."

At Emma's nod of understanding Regina closed her eyes and appeared to be summoning a spell from deep within her. A moment later she

opened her eyes and clasped her hands in front of her and began to worry them while she waited for Cora's arrival.

Emma opened her mouth to deliver some kind of reassuring words but immediately stopped at Regina's look and shake of the head. They stared at each other in silence as Emma attempted to convey her strength and protection towards Regina through a look alone.

"Regina," Cora announced as she walked from the hallway into the living room.

"Mother," Regina spoke nervously, moving her hands to her sides.

"What a strange world this is!" Cora announced in wonder as she looked Emma up and down in amusement, "the fashions really are quite strange. And the mechanical beasts."

"Cars," Regina prompted.

"Cars," Cora said as she stared at Emma causing Emma to look down at her boots and attempt to look respectful, "can we trust this one?"

"No," Regina said, causing Emma's head to snap up and look at her with a questioning gaze, "I don't trust any of them," she admitted, "I have managed to lose control of this.. Kingdom. Mother, I need your help."

Cora nodded, "of course, my dear, it was to be expected. You were never one for the strategies of leadership."

"Mother.. w-where is the boy?" Regina asked hesitantly.

"I left him imprisoned in a metal room I found on my travels, I thought we could utilise him later. There is no point in killing him unless it is for maximum effect," Cora said as she walked around the living room and looked with interest at the furniture and furnishings.

"I see," Regina attempted to sound casual, "what do you recommend, Mother?"

“Well, clearly there has been a lack of authority around here,” Cora slowly approached Regina with a disappointed smile, “you have been too lenient, child. They’ll never love you, Regina, not you.”

Cora roughly took Regina’s chin in her hand, “so much promise,” she whispered as she looked at Regina’s face critically, “but alas,” she softly pushed Regina away by her chin, “you were never to be a great leader. There is only so much I can do.”

“I’m sorry, Mother,” Regina bowed her head shamefully and Emma moved her hands to rest behind her back so she could clench her fists out of Cora’s line of vision.

“I sometimes wonder if I should blame myself,” Cora muttered even though it was clear she found herself utterly blameless in Regina’s perceived failure.

“You,” Cora looked at Emma, “how long have you worked as my daughter’s personal guard?”

Emma looked from Cora to Regina and back again before she finally spoke, “one year, Your Majesty,” she added the formality and hoped she sounded genuine.

“One year,” Cora nodded as she looked thoughtfully at Emma, “and would you say my daughter has been a good leader?”

Emma opened her mouth but no words came out as she struggled to know how to play the conversation.

“Come on,” Cora laughed, “it’s not a trick question, has she been a good leader?”

“She,” Emma paused for a moment, “she has been harsh but fair.”

“I see,” Cora nodded, “good,” she turned to Regina, “you’re halfway to being a good leader. However, you still have a way to go, from what I note there is no family right to lead here? No Royal family?”

“No, Mother,” Regina agreed, “the leader of the Kingdom here is called the Mayor, the Mayor is voted in democratically.”

“A democracy?” Cora spat the word out like she had been poisoned.

“Yes, Mother,” Regina said.

“You would allow a democratic vote to take away your right to rule?” Cora demanded.

“If I may, Your Majesty?” Emma stepped forward slightly with her head still bowed reverently.

“What?” Cora spat.

“There has never been an opponent to your daughter, the.. Kingdom.. is too fearful to contest her leadership. The illusion of a democracy is a genius plot,” Emma attempted to explain.

“Is this true?” Cora asked Regina.

“Yes, no one has ever stood against me,” Regina admitted.

“But they still think they have a democracy?” Cora smiled and nodded her head, “well, I have to say I’m impressed, Regina.”

“Thank you, Mother,” Regina smiled and spared a quick look of thanks to Emma for calming her mother.

“Of course you will have to hand power over to me in the interim, so I can see what state you have caused and fix your mess,” Cora shook her head.

“A town meeting is due today,” Regina said, “you could address the Kingdom then.”

Cora looked at Regina with a raised eyebrow, “yes, that sounds perfect. We can explain that you will be stepping down for a while,” she indicated Regina’s stomach with her hand, “due to your injuries.”

Regina suddenly realised where Cora would go with this and her eyes went wide, “Mother..”

“I was going to heal you but this way is better, it will seem like a real reason for you standing down and me taking your place,” Cora smiled as the plan came together nicely in her mind, “and then we can kill the boy in front of everyone.”

Chapter 29

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“But, Mother!” Regina stepped forward in disagreement at Cora’s plan to kill the boy but was suddenly lifted off of the ground and immobilised. She squirmed against the invisible restraints and Emma swallowed hard as she watched Cora’s particular brand of parenting skills.

“No, Regina!” Cora argued, “we will do this my way, I don’t know why you want to protect this ridiculous youth but it stops here and now. He attempted to kill you! How did you survive anyway? Those wounds looked very serious..”

“I took her to our.. healer..” Emma interjected before remembering herself, “Your Majesty.”

“You couldn’t even look after yourself!” Cora shook her head in angry disbelief, “such weakness!”

Emma winced as she realised she had done exactly what Regina had asked her not to, speak when not spoken to. Voice an opinion. She watched as Regina struggled as she floated high above them in the living room and she could see the panic and fear etched on her face.

“I’m sorry, Mother,” Regina bit out as she fought for breath.

Cora lowered Regina to the floor and released her from the magical bonds, “so much to learn my dear child.”

Regina nodded quietly, refusing to make eye contact with either woman in the room.

Across town Henry and Nova were slipping out unnoticed through a window in the laundry room. Henry was out of the window and waiting for Nova to follow him, "I'm not so sure this is a good idea, Henry," she told him as she climbed down.

"You heard what Belle said to Mother Superior.. er.. the Blue Fairy," Henry corrected, "they need the hat and if they don't find the hat then they won't be able to send Cora back!"

"But everyone is out looking for the hat," Nova pointed out, "maybe it would be best if we stayed in the convent and let the others.."

"No," Henry interrupted as he looked at his watch, "they have less than thirty minutes to find the hat and take it to the town hall for the meeting, Belle said they couldn't find it anywhere.

"But what makes you think that we'll be able to find it?" Nova asked as she followed Henry across the well-kept lawn on the convent.

"Kid network," Henry told her.

"Kid network?" Nova asked.

"Yeah, if you want to know where something is, or if you need to get something, you ask a kid," Henry told her as they hurried away from the convent and into town.

Back at Mifflin Street Emma had been told to leave Cora and Regina in peace, which to Emma's mind meant eavesdropping on their conversation from a separate room. Hearing Regina's side of the story in the hospital had been nothing compared to seeing and hearing Cora in the flesh. Emma thought the woman an absolute monster in every meaning of the word, she had never seen someone as strong and independent as Regina be so utterly shot down and turned into a mass of insecurity so quickly.

Suddenly a lot of Regina's less desirable personality traits made so much more sense, it was all an elaborate defence mechanism. Regina

was protecting herself from being hurt and she kept Henry in an ironclad grip because she feared being unlovable, she feared she would end up alone like her mother seemed to think she deserved.

Cora Mills took the idea of it being lonely at the top to whole new lengths and seemed to spend a lot of time convincing Regina that she was to never expect kindness or compassion from anyone. To the older woman's mind that was what leadership was all about, being alone and being feared rather than respected.

In light of that upbringing Emma found she was stunned that Henry had turned out so well. He was a loving, caring, compassionate, friendly and happy boy who charmed his way into the hearts and souls of everyone he came across. Emma was beginning to understand that that was all Regina's doing and while she had certainly been a strict parent she had also doted upon Henry and brought him up well.

Emma looked at her watch and noticed that the meeting was in fifteen minutes and she hoped that the others were having luck finding the hat.

At Jefferson's mansion David stepped out of the front door empty handed and raised his hands in defeat, "he isn't here," he told Mary Margaret who was standing at the bottom of the flight of steps, "and there are a lot of hats in there."

"He wouldn't leave it behind," Mary Margaret said, "if he has it then it's with him. Ruby has got his scent and is seeing if she can track him down."

David came down the steps to meet his wife and looked at his watch, "we're running out of time."

Mary Margaret nodded, "well," she said with false hope, "it wouldn't be us unless it was just in the nick of time."

David smiled his agreement, "true, I'd just like for once it to be with ten minutes to spare or something!"

At the Mayor's office Belle walked into Regina's office shaking her head, "it's definitely not here," she told Gold who was sitting in Regina's chair with his feet up on the desk.

"No, so I see," Gold agreed as she bit into an apple he had taken from the ever present fruit bowl on the table.

"Rumple," Belle admonished him "this is serious, the meeting starts in," she looked at the clock on the wall, "five minutes and no one has found the hat. Is there a plan B?"

Gold shook his head, "unfortunately not, Cora is very powerful, a direct attack would be suicide for anyone foolish enough to attempt it," he stood up and plucked his cane from the side of the desk, "and I'm certainly not in the mood to be snuffed out of existence by that woman."

"There must be something we can do?" Belle asked him.

"Hope that someone finds the hat," Gold said as he took another bite of apple.

Granny stood in the bustling town hall where the citizens of Storybrooke were gathering and raised her glasses to stare at the screen of her mobile phone as she called Ruby. Once she had mashed a couple of buttons and was satisfied that the device was doing its job she lowered her glasses and put her phone to her ear.

As soon as Ruby answered she barked down the phone, "get back here, the meeting is due to start in under five minutes, I imagine they will be fashionably late but if you are we'll be serving you at the diner tomorrow when they flambé you!"

She nodded and then hung up the phone and turned to Archie Hopper, "they are on their way here now."

"And?" Archie asked as he wrung his hands together anxiously.

“No sign of the hat,” Granny shook her head sadly.

Chapter 30

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The town hall was full to bursting save for the stage at the front of the hall. Mary Margaret and David were the last two to arrive and looked anxiously around the room only to be met with small shakes of the head that no one had been fortunate enough to find the hat. They made their way to the front, determined to defend their people if any trouble started to happen and Granny and Ruby made their way forward as well. True to his word, Gold didn't turn up.

Two minutes past the hour a dramatic burst of flames encompassed the back wall and a moment later Regina and Cora appeared in the middle of the stage. At the same time Emma was transported to the edge of the stage in a plume of black mist. If anyone had not been consumed by fear at Cora's arrival they would have noticed Regina's quick search of the stage and relief when her eyes fell upon Emma's form.

Cora stepped forward and addressed the crowd, "I see you all know who I am," she smiled wickedly, "but for the sake of formality let me introduce myself, I am Cora. And I am your new Queen."

A few murmurs of discontent were bravely uttered and Cora raised her arms in the air and an enormous crash of thunder was heard overhead, "unlike my daughter I am not a forgiving nor benevolent sort."

A few more crashes of thunder could be heard, "my darling daughter," she sniffed in mock tears and held her arm up towards Regina, "come here, my dear," Regina swallowed and tentatively approached her mother.

Cora placed her arm across Regina's shoulders and pulled her sharply to stand beside her causing Regina to wince through her injuries, "my daughter," Cora continued, "was subjected to a brutal attack. Unprovoked, uncalled for and malicious. This will not stand in my Kingdom."

Emma edged her way around the stage slightly so she was nearer the front of the stage and looked at Ruby meaningfully and felt her heart sink when the younger woman shook her head.

"A line in the sand must be drawn," Cora continued as she let go of Regina and took a menacing step forward, "an example needs to be made."

Cora snapped her fingers and Max Cornwall appeared on the stage, immobilised by some invisible force with tears falling down his cheeks.

"Max!"

Everyone turned as a female voice shouted out in the audience, Emma presume from the heart-breaking cry it was Max's mother.

"Silence!" Cora roared.

"This monster stabbed my daughter, your former Queen!" Cora declared as she circled the boy with a malevolent look in her eye, "and now he will pay."

Emma's gaze was shifted from watching Cora to a disturbance below her and she looked down to see Henry's smiling face looking up at her. Just as fear bubbled up inside her and she vowed to murder Nova, nun or not, she noticed the hat in his hands and he lifted it up and gently slid it onto the stage behind Emma's feet as he looked at Cora.

Neither Regina nor Cora had noticed this disturbance as Cora continued to circle Max while she addressed the crowd, "clearly there

is a lack of respect for authority, something which has presumably grown over time,” she continued.

Regina also realised there was something going on and glanced down into the crowd and her eyes met with Mary Margaret’s who was tilting her head towards Emma in an effort to capture Regina’s attention.

With a small frown Regina checked that her mother was not looking at her and then turned to look at Emma and noticed, with sheer relief, the hat hidden behind Emma’s tall boots.

“Consider this,” Cora announced, “the first,” she said as she took a few steps away from Max and raised her hand dramatically, “of many lessons!”

“Mother, no!” Regina shouted and stood in between her mother and Max.

“Get out of the way, Regina,” Cora hissed, “or I’ll remove you myself.”

“I won’t let you hurt him,” Regina said and raised a fireball in her hand and threw it towards Cora. Cora easily caught it and sent it back towards Regina and Max at twice the size. Regina raised her hands and leaned away from the heat of the flame as she extinguished it.

“Such a disappointment,” Cora said as she waved her hand and Regina raised up slowly in the air, her body immobilised save for her legs twitching slightly in a subconscious attempt to break free.

With a flick of Cora’s hand Regina flew behind Cora and into the wall behind Emma and fell to the floor with a crack.

“Regina,” Emma rushed to her side and looked up as Cora raised her hand towards Max once more.

Henry crawled up on stage and picked up the hat and placed it in Emma’s hands, “you’re the Saviour, you can do this!”

Emma looked down at the hat that Henry had given her and shook her head, “I..”

“Don’t argue,” Henry implored her, “just do it!”

Emma could feel her fingers tingling like when she had kick-started Regina’s magic in the hospital and placed the hat on the floor and bent down and held onto the rim. Cora sent out a bolt of lightning from her fingers that were curling around Max as the boy writhed in pain.

“Max!” Henry cried out and David rushed the stage and grabbed him to prevent him running towards the older boy.

Suddenly the hat started to spin and a white mist surrounded it. It rumbled loudly and Cora lowered her arm and turned around in surprise, “you,” she hissed at Emma and raised her hand towards the blonde.

As she did Emma stood up and kicked the hat towards Cora, it flew through the air and started to tilt towards the older woman who screamed as she saw the empty dark void coming towards her. A vortex of white mist rushed out of the hat and caught Cora in its grip and the woman disappeared mid-scream.

Max fell to his knees and breathed out a sigh of relief as a woman rushed the stage and bundled him into a tight embrace.

The hat rolled around on the stage limply and came to a stop in the middle of the stage, no longer moving, no longer glowing.

Chapter 31

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

It was dark but she felt like she had only recently become aware of the fact that it was dark, so she decided that that was an improvement and things were clearly changing. A distant noise, two really, a bright light. Her senses were suddenly returning. She heard an intake of breath, her own she wondered.

With a sudden realisation she discovered why she could not see and tried to prise her eyelids apart. The bright light was too much and she heard herself let out a low moan as she attempted to move her head to one side to avoid the brightness. Then a shadow was cast above her and realised that a soft, warm touch had been moving along her cheek ever since she began to wake up.

“Regina?” Emma’s soft voice whispered and Regina attempted to focus on the voice and the face, she winced at the brightness and the disorientation as she attempted to focus her eyes.

When their eyes met Regina was surprised to see the relieved and caring smile that lit up Emma’s face all the way to her eyes. She briefly wondered what had transpired to receive such a look from the blonde and then it all came to her in a momentary flash of understanding.

Emma saw the exact moment that Regina went from disorientated and cute to panicked and fearful and gently removed her hand from Regina’s cheek and placed it on her shoulder to prevent the older woman from attempting to sit up.

“Mother?” Regina panicked as her eyes roamed as much of the room as she could see and she attempted to sit up, only to be gently

restrained by the palm of Emma's hand pressing softly but firmly into her shoulder.

"Gone," Emma whispered reassuringly.

Regina looked at Emma with confusion, "gone?"

"Through the hat," Emma clarified, "gone, she's not here, I promise."

That took the edge off of Regina's panic but she was certainly still in a state of shock and concern as her eyes raced around the room in an attempt to capture errant thoughts and questions that she seemed to have.

"Henry?" Regina asked suddenly.

"Safe, well, drinking hot chocolate in Granny's and being treated like a hero," Emma laughed lightly with a roll of the eyes.

"The boy?" Regina asked, "Max, is he? Did Mother?"

"Max is fine, well, he is in a cell at the station but he is fine," Emma said.

Regina's face fell, "no, you must release him, Emma," she struggled against Emma's palm again but she was so weak it made no difference.

"Shh," Emma soothed, "you have to rest."

"But," Regina argued as she strained against Emma's palm.

"Regina," Emma said firmly causing the brunette to stop and take note, "if you don't stop straining they are going to want to sedate you and I know you don't want that. You were tossing and turning with nightmares which is why I've been trying to calm you, if they see you trying to sit up I'll be in big trouble," she smiled jokingly.

"How long?" Regina asked huskily.

“You’ve been here for three days,” Emma replied gently, “you took a crack to the head and your stitches ripped open. You lost a lot of blood they had to operate to relieve the swelling, we weren’t sure when you’d wake up..”

Regina understood from the tone that the truth was that they didn’t know if she was going to wake up. She relaxed her body and gently tilted her head to look around the room and frowned, “am I sharing a room with someone?”

“No,” Emma laughed softly, “they are for you.”

Regina looked at the flowers, cuddly toys and helium balloons and frowned, “why?”

“Because you defended a helpless child against your mother, the town got to see what a bitch of a childhood you must have endured and, from what I understand, David and Mary Margaret made an impassioned speech about your treatment,” Emma explained.

“What did they say?” Regina asked with an edge of cynicism.

“I don’t know, I was too busy getting you to the hospital. Again,” Emma sighed, “Regina,” Emma picked up Regina’s hand in both of hers, “I’m not sure I can take seeing you lying on the ground half dead and covered in blood again..”

“I’m sorry,” Regina said in a small voice.

“Why didn’t you tell me about Max?” Emma asked.

Regina sighed gently, “although I didn’t know his name I was aware of his friendship with Henry. I know when he got the book and he began to think I was.. her.. he confided in Max first. When I was picking Henry up from school one day the boy walked right up to me, bold as brass,” Regina smiled at the memory, “and he told me that he was on to me and that if I hurt Henry, he’d hurt me.”

With a low laugh Regina raised an eyebrow, “he was thirteen, hadn’t had any form of a growth spurt yet. He was a boy, nothing more. Just a boy protecting his friend. Protecting my son. And I thought to myself that if I’d had that kind of friend when I was growing up then maybe things would have been different. Of course I was wrong because my mother would have killed that kind of friend without a second thought.”

Emma nodded, “I questioned him and he said that when he hadn’t heard from Henry after the curse broke he was sure that you had done something to him. He’d been seeing Archie for a while before the curse broke, he said he felt like he had two people stuck in his head.”

“The curse was weakening,” Regina nodded slowly, “some people were becoming aware of their former self.”

“Exactly,” Emma agreed, “he was a teenage boy who snapped under the pressure.”

“Which is why you have to release him,” Regina told Emma firmly.

“I can’t let him go with no consequences whatsoever,” Emma explained, “he nearly killed you, Regina, that’s attempted murder and no matter the circumstances there has to be some repercussions.”

“But..” Regina attempted to argue.

“So,” Emma interrupted, “he is in a cell for the next couple of days while he talks things through with Archie and we come up with a rehabilitation plan for him. I don’t want him to suffer in jail for the rest of his life but at the moment that’s the safest place for him.”

“Safest place?” Regina questioned.

Emma bit her lip, “news of what he did to you has spread pretty quickly, people are angry.”

Regina looked incredulous, “but they hate me..”

“Seems that fairy tale characters are a fickle bunch,” Emma shrugged, “now they like you. Well, some do, some still hate you. And the ones who like you probably haven’t actually forgiven you but it’s totally a start,” she grinned.

Regina let out a small laugh, “something to build on,” she agreed.

“Regina,” Emma rubbed a thumb across Regina’s hand which she still held, “I.. want to start again.”

Regina furrowed her brow in confusion.

“Us,” Emma clarified, “I want to start again with us. We’ve had a lot of problems since we met but I’m kinda understanding them better now. I think we were very similar and we clashed, I.. well, spending all this time with you has made me see a few things.”

“There’s the pity again,” Regina sighed.

“Not pity,” Emma smiled, “compassion, understanding, respect.. more.”

“More?” Regina looked at Emma and saw that she was struggling to say something, “Emma?”

“I’m not very good at keeping secrets,” Emma smiled, “must have gotten that from my Mom..”

Regina smiled despite herself.

“And if there’s something I want to say I just kinda have to say it, I can’t keep it in. But I know that sometimes that’s not a good trait, that people think I should just keep things buried but that’s not me, you know?”

“Emma?” Regina questioned to stop the blonde from rambling, “what are you trying to say?”

“I like you,” Emma said simply.

“I like you too, dear,” Regina replied cordially.

“No,” Emma let go of Regina’s hand and reached over to the bedside table and picked up the magazine she had been reading the previous time she sat with Regina in hospital. She flicked the magazine open to a particular article and turned it to face Regina, “I like you,” she said.

Regina looked at the magazine page she was being shown with confusion. The picture showed a young, attractive woman with mid length hair and a question mark above her head. She was too far away to read the article but the headline read ‘how to tell her that you like her’.

“I like you,” Emma repeated with meaning.

“Oh,” Regina said in surprise, she hadn’t expected the Saviour to want to do anything other than kill her.

“You don’t have to say anything,” Emma said kindly as she tossed the magazine back where she picked it up from, “I know you’re straight and.. out of my league and.. well, I just wanted to tell you. Because, you know, because I can’t keep secrets.”

“Actually there’s a rather interesting Mediterranean chicken dish on page twenty four,” Regina said with a tilt of the head at the magazine, “maybe you could come over and I could make it for us?”

Emma’s face lit up in a bright smile and then she laughed, “you read my magazine?”

“No, I have my own copy, dear,” Regina replied with a grin, “I didn’t get to your article, what with being stabbed.”

Emma looked stunned, “you’re..”

“Not fussed about labels, or anatomy,” Regina replied with a dismissive shake of the head, “however I have nearly died twice by my count and I’d very much like you to kiss me, if you’re not to..”

Regina didn't have a chance to finish her sentence as Emma quickly bent forward and softly put her lips onto Regina's and gave her a soft, chaste kiss.

"Acceptable," Regina drawled when Emma leaned back.

Emma laughed, "well excuse me for not wanting to pounce on a hospital patient!"

"Thank you," Regina said with sudden seriousness.

"For?" Emma frowned.

"Staying with me, dealing with my mother," Regina explained, "I can't explain how much it meant to finally have someone on my side, by my side."

"Well, I am the Saviour," Emma winked.

"My personal Saviour?" Regina asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Henry seems to think so," Emma nodded.

"Henry?" Regina questioned.

"Well, of course I had to ask Henry if he would be okay if I took you out on a date or something, on the off chance you might say yes," Emma explained, "he said we're meant to be together, he said it's obvious."

Regina laughed, "obviously."

"Obviously," Emma agreed as she leaned down to give Regina a kiss she wouldn't be able to complain about.

THE END

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